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THE WORKS

OF

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ONE OF

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AND

PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND BELLES LETTRES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH;

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

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OF

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SERMON LIX.

On our present Ignorance of the Ways of God.

John, xiii. 7.

Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

THESE words of our Lord were occasioned by a circumstance in his behaviour which appeared mysterious to his disciples. When about to celebrate his last passover, he meant to give them an instructive lesson of condescension and humility. The mode which he chose for delivering this instruction, was the emblematical action of washing their feet. When Simon Peter saw his Master addressing himself to the performance of so menial an office, he exclaims with the greatest surprise, *Lord, dost thou wash my feet?* Our Lord replies in the words of the text, *What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.* "My behaviour, in this instance, may seem "unaccountable to you at present; but you shall "afterwards receive a satisfactory explanation of the "intent of that symbol which I now employ."

The expressions of a Divine Person on this occasion, can very naturally and properly be applied to

various instances, where the conduct of Providence, in the administration of human affairs, remains dark and mysterious to us. *What I do thou knowest not now.* We must for a while be kept in ignorance of the designs of Heaven. But this ignorance, though necessary at present, is not always to continue. A time shall come when a commentary shall be afforded on all that is now obscure; when the veil of mystery shall be removed; and full satisfaction be given to every rational mind. *Thou shalt know hereafter.* This is the doctrine which I propose to illustrate in the following discourse.

I. Our Saviour's words lead us to observe, that many things in the conduct of Providence are at present mysterious and unintelligible. The truth of this observation will not be called in question. It is indeed very readily admitted by all; and ever since the beginning of the world has been the foundation of many a complaint, and of much scepticism concerning the government of Heaven.—That human affairs are not left to roll on according to mere chance, and that Providence interposes in them to a certain degree, is made evident by various tokens to every candid mind. But the perplexity and trouble of the thoughtful enquirer arises from observing that Providence appears not to pursue any regular or consistent plan. An unaccountable mixture of light and darkness presents itself to us, when we attempt to trace the affairs of the world up to any wise and righteous administration. We see justice and order begun; but on many occasions they seem to be deserted. The ray of light which we had traced for a while suddenly forsakes us; and, where we had looked for

the continuance of order, we meet with confusion and disappointment. — For instance; when we examine the constitution of the human mind, we discern evident marks of its being framed with a view to favour and reward virtue. Conscience is endowed with signal authority to check vice. It brings home uneasiness and remorse to the bad; and it sooths and supports the righteous with self-approbation and peace. The ordinary course of human things is made to coincide in some degree with this constitution of our nature. The worthy and the good are, in general, honoured and esteemed. *He that walketh uprightly* is, for the most part, found to *walk surely*. The chief misfortunes that befal us in life can be traced to some vices or follies which we have committed; and it almost never happens but the *sinner's own wickedness is made* sooner or later *to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him.*

All this carries the impress of a just Providence, of a wise and a benevolent administration of the universe. We cannot avoid perceiving that the Almighty hath *set his throne for judgment.* At the same time, when we pursue our enquiries, the Almighty appears to *hold back the face of his throne, and to spread his cloud upon it.** For in looking abroad into the world, how many scenes do we behold which are far from corresponding with any ideas we could form of the government of Heaven? Many nations of the earth we see lying in a state of barbarity and misery; sunk in such gross ignorance as degrades them below the rank of rational beings; or abandoned to be the prey of cruel oppression and tyranny. When we

* Job, xxvi. 9.

look to the state of individuals around us, we hear the lamentations of the unhappy on every hand. We meet with weeping parents, and mourning friends. We behold the young cut off in the flower of their days, and the aged left desolate in the midst of sorrows. The useful and virtuous are swept away, and the worthless left to flourish. The lives of the best men are often filled with discouragements and disappointed hopes. Merit languishes in neglected solitude; and vanity and presumption gain the admiration of the world. From the scourge of calumny, and from the hand of violence, the injured look up to God as the Avenger of their cause; but often they look up in vain. He is *a God that hideth himself.* He dwelleth, as to them, in the secret place of darkness; or, if he dwelleth in light, it is in *light to which no man can approach.* Resignation may seal up their lips; but in silence they drop the tear and mourn while they adore.

SUCH, it must not be dissembled, are the difficulties which encounter us when we attempt to trace the present ways of God. At the same time, upon reflection, we may be satisfied that causes can be assigned for things appearing in this unfavourable light: and that there is no reason to be surprised at the Divine conduct being mysterious at present.

The monarchy of the universe is a great and complicated system. It comprehends numberless generations of men, who are brought forth to act their parts for purposes unknown to us. It includes two worlds at once; the world that now is, and which is only a small portion of existence; and a world that is to come, which endures for eternity. To us, no more than

the beginnings of things are visible. We see only some broken parts of a great whole. We trace but a few links of that chain of being, which, by secret connections, binds together the present and the future. Such knowledge is afforded us as is sufficient for supplying the exigencies and wants of our present state; but it does no more. Peeping abroad from a dark corner of the universe, we attempt in vain to explore the counsels that govern the world. It is an attempt to sound an unfathomable deep with a scanty line; and with a feeble wing to ascend above the stars. In any complicated work, even of human art, it is found necessary to be acquainted with the design of the whole, in order to judge of the fitness of its parts. In a scheme so complex as the administration of the world, where all the parts refer to one another, and where what is seen is often subordinate to what is invisible, how is it possible but our judgments must be often erroneous, and our complaints ill-founded? If a peasant or a cottager be incapable of judging of the government of a mighty empire, is it surprising that we should be at a loss concerning the conduct of the Almighty towards his creatures? *What I do thou knowest not now.*

But, on this argument still more can be said for our satisfaction. We are to observe, that complete information respecting the ways of God, not only was not to be expected here; but, moreover, that it would have been hurtful, if granted to us in our present state. It would have proved inconsistent with that state; with the actions which we have to perform in it, and the duties we have to fulfil. It would indeed have overthrown the whole design of

our being placed in this world. We are placed here under the trial of our virtue. Ignorance of the events that are ordained to befal us, ignorance of the plans and decrees of Heaven, enter necessarily into a state of trial. In order to exercise both our intellectual and moral powers, and to carry them forward to improvement, we must be left to find our way in the midst of difficulties and doubts, of hardships and sufferings. We must be taught to act our part with constancy, though the reward of our constancy be distant. We must learn to bear with patience whatever our Creator judges proper to lay upon us, though we see not the reason of the hardships he inflicts. If we were let into the secret of the whole plan of Providence; if the justice of Heaven were, in every step of its procedure, made manifest to our view, man would no longer be the creature he now is, nor would his present state answer any purpose of discipline or trial.

Mystery and darkness, therefore, must of necessity now take place in the course of things. Our present state can be no other than a state of twilight or dawn, where dubious forms shall often present themselves to us, and where we shall find ourselves in a middle condition between complete light and total darkness. Had we enjoyed no evidence of a just Judge ruling the earth, and of his providence interposing in our affairs, virtue would have been altogether deprived of its encouragement and support. Had the evidence, on the other hand, been so strong as to place the hand of the Almighty constantly before our eyes, the intention of our present existence would have been defeated, and no trial of virtue have remained. Instead, therefore, of com-

plaining of the obscurity which at present covers the conduct of Providence, we see that, on the whole, we have reason to submit and adore.

II. The text suggests that, though what God is doing, or what he intends to do, we *know not now*, yet there is ground to believe, that at some future period we shall receive information. *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* The question here arises, what that *hereafter* is, to which we are to look for the solution of our present doubts?

In the first place, *hereafter* may, on some occasions, refer to the subsequent course of events in this world. It often happens that the consequences of things throw light on the designs of God. The history of Providence, in proportion as it advances, disembroils itself. Though our present condition forbids extensive and complete information, yet as much is sometimes allowed to appear as gives us favourable openings into the righteous and benevolent counsels of Heaven. — Thus in the public affairs of the world it has been frequently seen, that from the most unpromising causes important and beneficent effects have, in the sequel, arisen. In our own country, at one period, the violent passions of a prince gave beginning to the Reformation. At another period, arbitrary attempts against religion and liberty occasioned that happy Revolution which has formed the æra of national prosperity. In many instances, *the wrath of man* has been made to *praise God.* Those wars and commotions that shake the moral world have answered similar purposes with

tempests in the natural world, of purging the air from noxious vapours, and restoring it to a temperature more sound and wholesome. From the midst of confusion, order has been made to spring; and from temporary mischief, lasting advantages to arise. —— In all cases of this nature, with which sacred and civil history abounds, secret designs of Heaven were going on, which were unfolded in the end. The wheel was always in motion. The hand of the clock was advancing with unperceived progress, till the moment came of its striking the appointed hour.

In like manner, with respect to individuals, there is often a *hereafter* in the course of their lives, which discloses and justifies the ways of God. Not to mention the good effects which misfortunes are found to produce on the minds of men, by checking their vices and correcting their errors, innumerable exemplifications can be given, of misfortunes paving their way to future advancement in the world. We are always querulous and impatient when designs succeed not according to our wish. Ignorance of what futurity is to bring forward, occupied with nothing but the present, we exclaim, Where is God? Where the sceptre of righteousness? *Hath he forgotten to be gracious?* or doth he indeed see, and is there knowledge in the Most High? *God seeth not as man seeth:* He looketh not merely to what you suffer, but to what the effect of these sufferings is to be. Consider only in how different a light the patriarch Joseph would view the events of his life, after he had seen in what they had terminated, from the light in which he saw them when led away by the Ishmaelites as a slave, or when thrown by Potiphar into the Egyptian prison. We murmur against Providence,

just as the impetuous youth frets against his instructors and tutors, who are keeping him under a strict, and, as he thinks, a needless, discipline. He knows not that, by their instruction and discipline, they are laying the foundation of his future fortunes; of the wealth which he is to acquire, and of the advancement to which he is to rise in the world. What may justly be said to him by his tutors and instructors, is equally applicable to us all under our present state of education; *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* —— Regarding, then, the unknown issue of all worldly events in this light, let us never despair; let us never think dishonourably of the government of God; but have patience till his providence accomplish its designs in its own way and at its own time. *Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.**

In the second place, The expression of *hereafter* in the text must be understood to refer, in its full extent, not to future events in this life, but to a subsequent state of being. For this life is no more than the beginning of the mighty and extensive plans of Providence. The seeds are only now sown, of what is to ripen and come forth, at the harvest of the world, when the revolution of the great moral year shall be finished, and the government of God shall obtain its full completion. It is the chief scope of religion to direct our view to this period; and it hath often taught us, that the knowledge of the ways of God, then enjoyed by the blessed, shall constitute a

* Job, xxxv. 14.

chief article of their felicity. *Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face. Now we know in part; but then we shall know even as we are known. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. In God's light we shall see light.* * The reasons that required obscurity to remain for a while on the ways of God no longer subsist. The education of good men is completed; and the intention of those steps of education, which once they could not comprehend, now becomes apparent. — Why this man was prematurely carried away from the world in the beginning of a promising course; why that deserving family were left overwhelmed with grief and despair, by the loss of one who was their sole benefactor and support; why friendships cemented by tender ties were suddenly torn asunder by death; these are enquiries to which we can now make no reply; and which throw a dark gloom over the conduct of the Almighty. But the spirits of the just above, who are admitted to a larger view of the ways of God, see the reasons of such counsels. They see that one man was seasonably taken away from dangers and evils to come, which, unknown to him, were hovering over his head. They see that Providence was in secret preparing unexpected blessings for the family who appeared to be left disconsolate and hopeless. They see that it was time for friendships to be dissolved, when their longer continuance would to some of the parties have proved a snare. Where we behold nothing but the rod of power stretched forth, they discern an interposition of the hand of mercy.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 10. 12. Psalm xxxvi. 9.

Let us wait till this promised *hereafter* arrive, and we shall in like manner be satisfied concerning the events that now disturb and perplex us. We shall then know why so much darkness and misery have been so long permitted to remain on the earth, and so much oppression and tyranny to prevail among the nations. We shall see rising as from the ashes of the whole world, a new and beautiful structure; *new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* As wide as is the difference between the appearance of the world when it lay in its primitive chaos, *without form and void*, and the appearance it has now assumed, when resplendent with the light of the sun, and decked with the beauties of nature; such is the difference between the divine plans in their beginnings, and in their full completion. At the conclusion, and not till then, the glory of the Lord shall become manifest to all; and, as it is described in the book of the Revelation, a voice shall be heard *from every creature which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, saying, Blessing and honour, and power and glory, be to him that sitteth on the throne. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.* *

Application of the doctrines that have been illustrated may be made to two classes of men.

First, To sceptics; who, from the present mysterious conduct of Providence, hastily draw the conclusion, that no government is exercised over human affairs, but that all things are suffered indis-

* Rev. v. 13.—xv. 3.

criminately to come alike to all men. — I have shewn that, from the inadequate views which we are at present able to take of the general system, such mysterious appearances of Providence must be expected to take place. Not only so, but I have also shewn it to be fit and necessary that this mixture of obscurity should now remain; as a full display of regular justice and order would be inconsistent with the moral improvement of men in this life. — Let me desire the sceptic to look to the state of the natural world. When he thinks of the order and magnificence that prevail in it, he will, perhaps, be unwilling to pronounce it the mere production of chance. He cannot but recognize the hand of intelligence, and acknowledge it to have proceeded from a designing cause. I ask him, whether in the natural world he discerns not as many mysterious and puzzling appearances as are to be found in the moral world? Are not destructive storms, burning mountains, uninhabitable deserts, as difficult to be reconciled to his preconceived ideas of supreme wisdom and goodness in the Creator, as the sufferings and afflictions which in the course of providence befal the just? The natural and moral world are, in this respect, counter-parts to one another. Both are marked with the same characters, and carry the impress of the same powerful and gracious hand. In both, it is evidently the intention of the first author not to render every thing level to our capacity; but in the midst of high design and order, to allow certain objects to appear, which contradict the ideas we have formed, and mock our vain researches. Now, if we are obliged to admit that the order and beauty of the natural world sufficiently prove it to be the work of a wise Creator,

notwithstanding the seeming deformities which it exhibits; are we not led by the same train of reasoning to conclude, that the moral world is under the direction of a wise Governor, though much of what he now does we cannot satisfactorily explain.

Secondly, THE doctrine of the text is to be applied not only for silencing sceptics, but for comforting the pious. Never let them be dejected by the darkness which now covers the ways of the Almighty. If he withdraw himself from their view, it is not because he neglects them; but because they are incapable of comprehending his designs; because it were not for their good that all his designs were revealed to them.—Instead of perplexing themselves about what is obscure, let them rest on the clear and authentic discoveries that have been given of the Divine goodness. Let them rest on those great and signal facts that prove it; particularly on that illustrious fact, the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. He that *spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all*, will assuredly not always conceal himself from those who serve him. Though what he does they *know not now*, the time approaches when *they shall know hereafter*. Till that time come, let them believe and trust; let them hope and adore. From this conclusion let them never depart, that to *fear God and keep his commandments*, is in every situation the truest wisdom; that if there be government in the universe at all, the virtuous and the worthy are loved and protected by Heaven: that in *due season they shall reap if they faint not; for the care of them is with the Lord, and their reward with the Most High.*

SERMON LX.

On the Slavery of Vice.

2 Peter, ii. 19.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

BONDAGE and subjection are disagreeable sounds to the ear, disagreeable ideas to the mind. The advocates of vice, taking advantage of those natural impressions, have in every age employed them for discrediting religion. They represent it as the bondage and confinement of the free-born soul of man; as a state of perpetual constraint, formed by a system of severe rules, which designing men have contrived to impose as fetters on the multitude. On the other hand, they paint a licentious course to themselves, and hold it out to the world, as the gay and pleasurable enjoyment of life; where, having surmounted the prejudices of education, and the timorous scruples of conscience, men can think and act at pleasure, and give full scope to every wish of the heart.—But what if those pretended sons of freedom be themselves held in miserable subjection, and their boasts of liberty be no more than the *swelling words of vanity?* The Apostle asserts in the text, that, while they *promise liberty* to others, they are the *servants*, or slaves of *corruption, overcome and*

brought into bondage by it. This assertion of the Apostle I propose to illustrate. I shall endeavour to make it appear, that no true liberty can arise from vice; that bad men undergo the worst servitude; and that no one is free, but he who is virtuous and good.

It is necessary to begin with removing false ideas of liberty, and shewing in what it truly consists. We are not to imagine that to be free, imports our being set loose from restraint or rule of every kind. No man, in any condition of life, is at liberty to act always as he pleases, and to gratify every wish he forms. The nature of the human state necessarily imposes on all men various restraints. The laws of society allow no one to indulge himself in pursuits or pleasures that are injurious to his neighbour. Even our own nature limits our pleasures within certain bounds. All our desires cannot be gratified together. They frequently interfere, and require him who would indulge one favourite passion, to deny himself in another. Distinctions, therefore, must be made, preferences be given, and some general regulations of conduct be observed, by every one who consults his own welfare. If there be any regulation which ensures us of safety and happiness, to be disengaged from the observance of that regulation is no article of liberty; at least of such liberty as a wise man would wish to enjoy. It is in effect to be turned loose to our own ruin. It is such liberty as a blind man enjoys, of wandering at random, and striking into every devious path, without a guide to direct his steps, and save him from destruction.

That unbounded licentiousness, therefore, which

sinners prefer to every regulation of conduct, is altogether different from true freedom. It is in moral behaviour the same as anarchy is in a state, where law and order are extinct. Anarchy, surely, is no less incompatible with true liberty than absolute despotism; and of the two it is hard to say which is the least eligible, or the most miserable state. Liberty by no means supposes the absence of all government. It only supposes that the government under which we are placed is wise; and that the restraints to which we voluntarily submit ourselves have been contrived for the general interest.

To be free, therefore, imports, in general, our being placed in such circumstances, that, within the bounds of justice and good order, we can act according to our own deliberate choice, and take such measures for our conduct as we have reason to believe are conducive to our welfare; without being obstructed either by external force, or by violent internal impulse. This is that happy and dignified state which every wise Man earnestly wishes to enjoy. The advantages which result from it are chiefly these three: freedom of choice; independence of mind; boldness and security. In opposition to these distinguishing characters of liberty, I now proceed to shew that, in the first place, vice deprives bad men of free choice in their actions; that, in the second place, it brings them under a slavish dependence on external circumstances; and that, in the third place, it reduces them to that abject, cowardly, and disquieted state which is essentially characteristic of bondage.

I. Vice is inconsistent with liberty, as it deprives sinners of the power of free choice, by bringing them

under the dominion of passions and habits. Religion and virtue address themselves to reason. They call us to look round on every side; to think well of the consequences of our actions; and, before we take any step of importance, to compare the good with the evil that may ensue from it. He therefore, who follows their dictates, acts the part of a man who freely consults, and chooses, for his own interest. But vice can make no pretensions of this kind. It awaits not the test of deliberate comparison and choice; but overpowers us at once by some striking impression of present advantage or enjoyment. It hurries us with the violence of passion; captivates us by the allurements of pleasure; or dazzles us by the glare of riches. The sinner yields to the impulse, merely because he cannot resist it. Reason remonstrates; conscience endeavours to check him; but all in vain. Having once allowed some strong passion to gain the ascendant, he has thrown himself into the middle of a torrent, against which he may sometimes faintly struggle, but the impetuosity of the stream bears him along. In this situation he is so far from being free, that he is not master of himself. He does not go, but is driven; tossed, agitated, and impelled; passive, like a ship to the violence of the waves.

After passion has for a while exercised its tyrannical sway, its vehemence may by degrees subside. But when, by long indulgence, it has established habits of gratification, the sinner's bondage becomes then more confirmed, and more miserable. For during the heat of pursuit, he is little capable of reflection. But when his ardour is abated, and, nevertheless, a vicious habit rooted, he has full

leisure to perceive the heavy yoke he has brought upon himself. How many slaves do we see in the world to intemperance, and all kinds of criminal pleasure, merely through the influence of customs, which they had allowed to become so inveterate that it was not in their power to alter them? Are they not often reduced to a condition so wretched, that when their licentious pleasures have become utterly insipid, they are still forced to continue them, solely because they cannot refrain; not because the indulgence gives them pleasure, but because abstinence would give them pain; and this too, even when they are obliged at last to condemn their habits of life, as injuring their fortune, impairing their constitution, or disgracing their character? Vice is not of such a nature that we can say to it, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther.* Having once entered into its territories, it is not in our power to make a retreat when we please. *He that committeth sin is the servant of sin.* No man who has once yielded up the government of his mind, and given loose rein to his desires and passions, can tell how far these may carry him. He may be brought into such a desperate state, that nothing shall remain for him but to look back with regret upon the forsaken path of innocence and liberty; and severely conscious of the thraldom he suffers, to groan under fetters which he despairs of throwing off. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil?* *

Vice confirms its dominion, and extends it still farther over the soul, by compelling the sinner to

* Jeremiah, xiii. 23.

support one crime by means of another. Not only is he enslaved to those vices which take their rise from his own inclination, but they render others necessary, to which, against his inclination, he must submit; and thereby strengthen the commanding power of iniquity within him. The immoderate love of pleasure, for instance, leads him into expense beyond his fortune. In order to support that expense, he is obliged to have recourse to law and dishonourable methods of gain, which originally he despised. To cover these, he is forced upon arts of dissimulation and fraud. One instance of fraud obliges him to support it by another; till, in the end, there arises a character of complicated vice; of luxury shooting forth into baseness, dishonesty, injustice, and perhaps cruelty. It is thus that one favourite passion brings in a tribe of auxiliaries, to complete the dominion of sin. Among all our corrupt passions there is a strong and intimate connection. When any one of them is adopted into our family, it never quits us until it has fathered upon us all its kindred.—— By such means as these, by the violence of passions, by the power of habits, and by the connection of one vice with another, sin establishes that servitude over the will, which deprives bad men of all power of free choice in their actions.

II. The slavery produced by vice appears in the dependence under which it brings the sinner to circumstances of external fortune. One of the favourite characters of liberty is, the independence it bestows. He who is truly a free man is above all servile compliances, and abject subjection. He is

able to rest upon himself; and while he regards his superiors with proper deference, neither debases himself by cringing to them, nor is tempted to purchase their favour by dishonourable means. But the sinner has forfeited every privilege of this nature. His passions and habits render him an absolute dependant on the world, and the world's favour; on the uncertain goods of fortune, and the fickle humours of men. For it is by these he subsists, and among these his happiness is sought; according as his passions determine him to pursue pleasure, riches, or preferments. Having no fund within himself whence to draw enjoyment, his only resource is in things without. His hopes and fears all hang upon the world. He partakes in all its vicissitudes; and is moved and shaken by every wind of fortune. This is to be, in the strictest sense, a slave to the world.

Religion and virtue, on the other hand, confer on the mind principles of noble independence. *The upright man is satisfied from himself.* He despises not the advantages of fortune; but he centers not his happiness in them. With a moderate share of them, he can be contented; and contentment is felicity. Happy in his own integrity, conscious of the esteem of good men, reposing firm trust in the providence, and the promises of God, he is exempted from servile dependence on other things. He can wrap himself up in a good conscience, and look forward, without terror, to the change of the world. Let all things shift around him as they please, he believes that, by the divine ordination, they shall be made *to work together* in the issue *for his good:* And therefore, having much to hope from God, and little to fear from the world, he can be easy in every

state. One who possesses within himself such an establishment of mind, is truly free. — But shall I call that man free, who has nothing that is his own, nor property assured; whose very heart is not his own, but rendered the appendage of external things, and the sport of fortune? Is that man free, let his outward condition be ever so splendid, whom his imperious passions detain at their call, whom they send forth at their pleasure to drudge and toil, and to beg his only enjoyment from the casualties of the world? Is he free, who must flatter and lie, to compass his ends; who must bear with this man's caprice, and that man's scorn; must profess friendship where he hates, and respect where he contemns; who is not at liberty to appear in his own colours, nor to speak his own sentiments; who dares not be honest lest he should be poor? —— Believe it, no chains bind so hard, no fetters are so heavy, as those which fasten the corrupted heart to this treacherous world; no dependence is more contemptible than that under which the voluptuous, the covetous, or the ambitious man lies, to the means of pleasure, gain, or power. Yet this is the boasted liberty which vice promises, as the recompence of setting us free from the salutary restraints of virtue.

III. Another character of the slavery of vice, is that mean, cowardly, and disquieted state to which it reduces the sinner. Boldness and magnanimity have ever been accounted the native effects of liberty. He who enjoys it, having nothing to apprehend from oppressive power, performs the offices, and enjoys the comforts of life, with a manly and undisturbed mind.

Hence his behaviour is dignified, and his sentiments are honourable; while he who is accustomed to bend under servile subjection, has always been found mean-spirited, timorous, and base. — Compare, in these respects, the virtuous and the vicious man, and you will easily see to which of them the characteristics of freedom most justly belong. The man of virtue, relying on a good conscience and the protection of Heaven, acts with firmness and courage; and, in the discharge of his duty, fears not the face of man. The man of vice, conscious of his low and corrupt aims, shrinks before the stedfast and piercing eye of integrity; is ever looking around him with anxious and fearful circumspection, and thinking of subterfuges, by which he may escape from danger. The one is *bold as a lion;* the other *flieth when no man pursueth.* To the one, nothing appears contemptible, by which he can procure any present advantage. The other looks with disdain on whatever would degrade his character. "I will not," says he, "so demean myself, as to catch the favour of "the greatest man, by this or that low art. It "shall not be said or thought of me, that I did "what was base, in order to make my fortune. "Let others stoop so low, who cannot be without "the favours of the world. But I can want them, "and therefore at such a price I will not purchase "them." This is the voice of true liberty; and speaks that greatness of mind which it is formed to inspire.

Corresponding to that abject disposition which characterises a bad man, are the fears that haunt him. The terrors of a slave dwell on his mind, and often appear in his behaviour. For guilt is

never free from suspicion and alarm. The sinner is afraid, sometimes, of the partners of his crimes, lest they betray him; sometimes, of those who have suffered by his crimes, lest they revenge themselves; frequently, of the world around him, lest it detect him; and, what is worst of all, he is reduced to be afraid of himself. There is a witness within him, that testifies against his misdeeds; and threatens him in secret, when other alarms leave him. Conscience holds up to his view the image of his past crimes, with this inscription engraved upon it, "*God "will bring every work into judgment.*" How opposite is such a state as this, to the peaceful security arising from the liberty enjoyed by the virtuous? —— Were there nothing more in the circumstances of sinners to affix upon them the marks of servitude, this alone would be sufficient, that, as the Scripture expresses it, *through fear of death they are all their lifetime subject to bondage.** Death sets all other captives free. The slave who digs in the mine, or labours at the oar, can rejoice at the prospect of laying down his burden together with his life; and tastes the hope of being at last on equal terms with his cruel oppressor. But, to the slave of guilt there arises no hope from death. On the contrary, he is obliged to look forward with constant terror to this most certain of all events, as the conclusion of all his hopes, and the commencement of his greatest miseries.

I HAVE thus set before you such clear and unequivocal marks of the servitude undergone by sinners,

* Heb. ii. 15.

as fully verify the assertion in the text, that a state of vice and corruption is a state of bondage. In order to perceive how severe a bondage it is, let us attend to some peculiar circumstances of aggravation which belong to it.

First, It is a bondage to which the mind itself, the native seat of liberty, is subjected. In other cases, a brave man can comfort himself with reflecting that, let tyrants do their worst, let prisons or fetters be his lot, his mind remains unconquered and free. Of this liberty, they cannot rob him; here he moves in a higher sphere, above the reach of oppression or confinement. But what avails the show of external liberty, to one who has lost the government of himself? As our Saviour reasons in another case, *If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?* So we may reason here, if that part of thy nature, thy mind, thy will, by which only thou canst enjoy and relish liberty, be itself in bondage to evil passions and habits, how miserable must be that bondage?

Next, it is aggravated by this consideration, that it is a bondage which we have brought upon ourselves. To have been forced into slavery, is misfortune and misery. But to have renounced our liberty and chosen to be slaves, is the greatest reproach added to the greatest misery. Moments there frequently must be when a sinner is sensible of the degradation of his state; when he feels with pain the slavish dependence under which he is brought to fortune and the world, to violent passions and settled habits, and to fears and apprehensions arising from conscious guilt. In such moments, how cruel is the reflection, that of all this disgrace and misery he has been the

author to himself; that, by voluntary compliance, he has given to his passions that haughty ascendant which they now exercise over him; has forged the chains with which he is bound, and sold himself to do iniquity.

Lastly, The servitude of vice is accompanied with this farther aggravation, that it is subjection to our own servants. Those desires and passions which the sinner has raised to lawless rule, were given us as instruments of self-preservation; but were plainly designed to be under the direction of a higher power. Of themselves, they are headstrong and blind; they bear all the marks of intended subordination; and conscience is invested with every ensign of authority and supremacy. But sin inverts the whole frame of human nature. It compels reason to bow down before those passions which it was formed to command; and leads it, as it were, in triumph, to grace the shameful conquest of its ministers and servants. It has been always observed that none are so insolent in power, as they who have usurped an authority to which they had no right; and so it is found to hold in this instance. The desires and passions of a vicious man having once obtained an unlimited sway, trample him under their feet. They make him feel that he is subject to divers, and contradictory as well as imperious masters, who often pull him different ways. His soul is rendered the receptacle of many repugnant and jarring dispositions; and resembles some barbarous country, cantoned out into different principalities, who are continually waging war on one another.——Such is the state into which sinners have brought themselves, in order to be free from the supposed confinement of virtue. Where they

had promised themselves nothing but ease and pleasure, they are made to experience restraints more severe, and mortifications more painful, than any which they would have undergone under the discipline of religion.

It will perhaps be contended by some, that although the representation which has now been given of the slavery of sin holds true in certain instances, yet that it is applicable only to those who come under the description of atrocious sinners. They imagine that a certain moderate course may be held in vice, by means of which, men, without throwing altogether aside the restraints of reason, may enjoy an easy and pleasurable life.——By reasoning thus, my friends, you flatter and deceive yourselves to your own destruction. Be assured that, by every vicious indulgence, you are making an approach to a state of complete slavery; you are forfeiting a certain share of your liberty; how soon the whole of it may be forfeited, you are not aware. It is true, that all which has now been said of the servitude of sin, applies only to a character corrupted in the extreme. But remember, that to this extreme no man ever arrives at once. He passes through many of those intermediate stages, in one of which you are now perhaps found. Vice always creeps by degrees; and insensibly twines around us those concealed fetters by which we are at last completely bound.—As you value therefore your liberty and your happiness, avoid every approach to evil. Consider all vicious pleasures as enchanted ground, by entering on which, you will be farther and farther ensnared within the magic circle, till at length you are precluded from all retreat. The most pure and virtuous man is always

the freest. The religion of Christ is justly entitled the *perfect law of liberty.* * It is only when the *Son makes us free*, that *we are free indeed*: and it was with reason the Psalmist said, *I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts.* †

* James, i. 25. † Psalm cxix. 45.

SERMON LXI.

On the Importance of Public Worship.

Psalm xxvi. 8.

Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.

GOD is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. That religion chiefly consists in an inward principle of goodness, is beyond dispute, and that its value and efficacy are derived from its effects in purifying the heart, and reforming the life. All external services, which have not this tendency, are entirely insignificant. They degenerate into mere superstition, equally unacceptable to God, and unprofitable to man. Hence they are so often treated in Scripture, with high contempt, when substituted in the room of the important duties of a virtuous life.

Notwithstanding this, it is certain that external services have their own place, and a considerable one too, in the system of religion. What their proper place is, no one can be at a loss to discern, who will only make a just distinction between the means, and the end, in religion. It is evident there is danger in man's erring here either on one side or other; and it is certain that they have erred on both. After it was observed, that mankind were prone to lay too much weight on the external parts of religion, it began to

be thought that no weight was to be allowed to them at all. The time was, when all religion centered in attending the duties of the church, and paying veneration to whatever was accounted sacred. This alone sanctified the character, and compensated every blemish in moral conduct. From this extreme the spirit of the age seems to be running fast into the opposite extreme, of holding every thing light that belongs to public worship. But if superstition be an evil, and a very great one it undoubtedly is, irreligion is not a smaller evil: And though the *form of godliness* may often remain when the *power* of it is wanting; yet the *power* cannot well subsist where the *form* is altogether gone.—The holy Psalmist, whose words are now before us, discovers much better principles. Expressing always the highest regard for the laws of God, and the precepts of virtue, he breathes at the same time a spirit of pure devotion. Though loaded with the cares of royalty, and encircled with the splendour of a court, he thought it well became him to show respect to the great Lord of nature; and on many occasions expresses, as he does in the text, his delight in the public service of the temple. *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.* In discoursing from which words, I purpose to show the importance of the public worship of God, and the benefits resulting from it. I shall consider it in three lights; as it respects God; as it respects the world; as it respects ourselves.

I. Let us consider it with respect to God. If there exist a Supreme Being, the Creator of the world, no consequence appears more natural and direct than

this, that he ought to be worshipped by his creatures, with every outward expression of submission and honour. We need only appeal to every man's heart, whether this be not a principle which carries along with it its own obligation, that to Him who is the fountain of our life and the Father of our mercies; to Him who has raised up that beautiful structure of the universe in which we dwell, and where we are surrounded with so many blessings and comforts; solemn acknowledgements of gratitude should be made, praises and prayers should be offered, and all suitable marks of dependence on him be expressed.—This obligation extends beyond the silent and secret sentiments of our hearts. Besides private devotion, it naturally leads to associations for public worship; to open and declared professions of respect for the Deity. Where blessings are received in common, an obligation lies upon the community, jointly to acknowledge them. Sincere gratitude is always of an open and diffusive nature. It loves to pour itself forth; to give free vent to its emotions; and, before the world, to acknowledge and honour a benefactor.

So consonant is this to the natural sentiments of mankind, that all the nations of the earth have, as with one consent, agreed to institute some forms of worship; to hold meetings at certain times in honour of their deities. Survey the societies of men in their rudest state; explore the African deserts, the wilds of America, or the distant islands of the ocean; and you will find that over all the earth some religious ceremonies have obtained. You will every where trace, in one form or other, the temple, the priest, and the offering. The prevalence of the most absurd superstitions furnishes this testimony to the

truth, that in the hearts of all men the principle is engraved, of worship being due to that invisible Power who rules the world. — Herein consists the great excellency of the Christian religion, that it hath instructed us in the simple and spiritual nature of that worship. Disencumbered of idle and unmeaning ceremonies, its ritual is pure, and worthy of a Divine Author. Its positive institutions are few in number, most significant of spiritual things, and directly conducive to good life and practice. How inexcusable, then, are we, if, placed in such happy circumstances, the sense of those obligations to the public worship of God shall be obliterated among us, which the light of nature inculcated, in some measure, on the most wild and barbarous nations!

The refinements of false philosophy have indeed suggested this shadow of objection, that God is too great to stand in need of any external service from his creatures; that our expressions of praise and honour are misplaced with respect to Him, who is above all honour and all praise; that in his sight, the homage we seek to pay must appear contemptible; and is therefore in itself superfluous and trifling. —— But who hath taught those vain reasoners, that all expressions of gratitude and honour towards a superior become unsuitable, merely because that superior needs not any returns? Were they ever indebted to one whose favours they had it not in their power to repay; and did they, on that account, feel themselves set loose from every obligation to acknowledge, and to praise their benefactor? On the contrary, the more disinterested his beneficence was, did not gratitude, in any ingenuous mind, burn with the greater ardour, and prompt them the more

eagerly to seize every opportunity of publicly testifying the feelings of their hearts? —— Almighty God, it is true, is too great to need our service or homage. But he is also too good not to accept it, when it is the native expression of a grateful and generous mind. If pride and self-sufficiency stifle all sentiments of dependence on our Creator; if levity, and attachment to worldly pleasures, render us totally neglectful of expressing our thankfulness to Him for his blessings; do we not hereby discover such a want of proper feeling, such a degree of hardness and corruption in our affections, as shows us to be immoral and unworthy; and must justly expose us to the high displeasure of Heaven? On the contrary, according to every notion which we can form of the Father of the universe, must it not be acceptable to him to behold his creatures properly affected in heart towards their great Benefactor; assembling together to express, in acts of worship, that gratitude, love, and reverence which they owe him; and thus nourishing and promoting in one another an affectionate sense of his goodness? Are not such dispositions, and such a behaviour as this, intimately connected with all virtue?

O come, let us worship and bow down! let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God; and we are the flock of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. The prayer of the upright is his delight. It cometh before him as incense, and the uplifting of their hands as the evening sacrifice. —— Having thus shown the reasonableness of public worship with respect to God, let us now,

II. Consider its importance in another view, as it respects the world. When we survey the general state of mankind, we find them continually immersed in worldly affairs; busied about providing the necessaries of life, occupied in the pursuits of their pleasures, or eagerly prosecuting the advancement of their interests. In such a situation of things, a small measure of reflection might convince any one, that without some returns of sacred days, and some solemn calls to public worship, it were impossible to preserve in the world any sense of objects, so foreign to the general current of thought, as an invisible Gvern or, and a future state. If it be of importance to the peace and good order of society, that there should prevail among men the belief of One in the heavens, who is the protector of righteousness and the avenger of crimes; if it be of importance that they be taught to look forward to a day of judgment, when they are to be brought to account for their most secret actions, and eternally rewarded or punished, according as their conduct has been good or evil; if such principles as these, I say, be of consequence to the public welfare, they certainly enforce the authority of public worship, and prove the necessity of religious instruction.

I speak now particularly with a view to the multitude, the great mass and body of the people. We all know, how seldom from education, or private instruction, they have the advantage of deriving sentiments of religion or morality. Early obliged to labour for their bread, they would remain all their days in gross ignorance of every moral or sacred principle, were it not for those public assemblies in

which they hear of God, and Christ, and judgment, and heaven, and hell. Shut up those temples to which they resort with reverence; exclude them from the opportunities they now possess of receiving religious instruction, and imbibing religious ideas; and what can you expect them to become? No other than a ferocious rabble, who, set free from checks of conscience, and fears of divine vengeance, would be prone to every outrage which they could commit with impunity. It is well known, that in the early ages of the world, sages and legislators who endeavoured to tame and to associate the barbarous hordes of men, found it necessary for this purpose to have recourse to religion. By bringing the rude multitudes to worship together, and at stated times and places, to join in hymns and songs to their deities, they gradually restrained them from violence, and trained them to subordination and civilized life.

During the progress of society in after-periods, religious assemblies at church continue, I am persuaded, to have a very considerable influence on the civilization and improvement of the people. Even independent of effect upon the moral principles, by leading numbers of them to meet together in an orderly way, and in their most decent appearance, they tend to humanize and polish their manners. They strengthen the social connections, and promote friendly intercourse among those who are in the same neighbourhood, and in the same lines of life. It must, at the same time, be agreeable to every humane mind to think, that one day in seven is allotted for rest to the poor from their daily labours, and for such enjoyments of ease and comfort as their station affords. It is the only day which gives them

occasion to feel themselves as belonging to the same class of beings with their superiors; when joining with them in the same acts of worship, and recognizing a common Lord. Amidst those distinctions which the difference of ranks necessarily introduces into human society, it is surely fit that there be some occasions when man can meet with man as a brother, in order that the pride of the great may be checked; and the low may be taught that, if they discharge properly their appointed part, they have reason to expect from the Lord of the universe, the same rewards with the rich and the mighty.

It will, I believe, be generally admitted that forms of public worship, and means of religious instruction, are important, on several accounts, for the body of the people, and belong to the maintenance of public safety and order. But many who admit this, are apt to think, that to the common people alone they may be left. To persons of liberal education and enlarged minds, what benefit can arise from hearing what they already know; and what, perhaps, is to be inculcated on them by those who are of inferior capacity to themselves? —— Admitting this plea of superiority which their vanity forms, and setting aside for the present any personal obligations they are under to worship God, I must ask such persons, how they can expect that religious assemblies will be long respected by the lower ranks of men, if by men of rank and education they are discountenanced and forsaken? Do not they know, that those lower ranks are ready to copy the manners, and to follow the example of their superiors in all things; but assuredly in nothing more than in what appears to set them free from restraint, and to gratify licentious-

ness? While they acknowledge the importance, and even the necessity of public religion to certain classes of men, do they nevertheless contribute by their behaviour to defeat the end of public religion, and to annihilate that importance which they ascribe to it?——They are employed in framing laws and statutes for preventing crimes, and keeping the disorderly multitude within bounds; and at the same time, by personally discountenancing public worship, they are weakening, they are even abolishing, among the multitude, that moral restraint which is of more general influence upon manners than all the laws they frame. In vain they complain of the dishonesty of servants, of the insolence of mobs, of the attacks of the highwayman. To all these disorders they have themselves been accessory. By their own disregard of sacred institutions, they have disseminated profligacy among the people. They have broken down the flood-gates which served to restrain the torrent; they have let it loose to overflow the land; and by the growing deluge may themselves be swept away.——But I must next argue upon a different ground; and proceed,

III. To set forth the importance of the public worship of God to every individual in every rank of life. Whatever his station be, he is still a man; and has the duties of a man to perform. Were his attendance on divine worship of no other effect, than to add countenance to a salutary institution, this alone would render it his duty. But moreover, we assert it to be his duty on his own account; if it be the duty of every man to use the proper means of preserving and fortifying his virtue. All the Christian

institutions have a direct tendency to this end. They all serve to give warmth to piety, and to add solemnity to moral virtue. A very high opinion, indeed, that man must have of his own character, who imagines that, amidst all the follies and corruptions of the world, he stands in need of no assistance for enabling him to act his part with propriety and dignity.

The question is not, Whether persons of rank and education are to learn any thing that is new to them, by frequenting the places of public worship? The great principles of piety and morality are obvious and easily known; and we shall readily admit, that there are many to whom no new instruction is communicated in the house of God. But, my friends, the purpose of your going there is to have known truths recalled to your mind, and their dormant influence awakened; is to have serious meditations suggested; to have good dispositions raised; to have the heart adjusted to a composed and tranquil frame. Is there any man of reason and reflection, who will not acknowledge such effects, as far as they follow from attendance on religious ordinances, to be of the most beneficial nature? These occasional cessations from the cares and anxieties of life, these interruptions to the bustle and the passions of the world, in order to think and hear of eternity, are both a relief and an improvement to the mind. By this retreat from its ordinary circle of thoughts, it is enabled to return with more clearness and more vigour to the business of the world, after a serious and proper pause.

But I must ask the persons with whom I now reason, whether there be no other call to come to God's house, than to hear instruction there? Is not the

devout adoration of the God of heaven the principal object of our religious assemblies; and is this what any man of reflection, and of sober mind, dare to make light of? In the temple of the Lord, the rich and the poor, the prince and the peasant, appear as suppliants alike for the protection and favour of the Almighty.—Great and flourishing as thou mayest think thyself, know that thou standest as much in need of that protection, as the meanest of the crowd whom thou beholdest worshipping, with lowly reverence, the God of their fathers. The sun of prosperity shines at present on thy head, and the favourable gale carries thee softly along the stream of life. But, the Almighty needs only to give the word, and instantly the tempest shall rise; and thy frail bark shall be driven into the ocean, and whelmed in the deep. *In my prosperity I said I shall never be moved. Thou, Lord, didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.* Look up, with dread, to that awful hand of Providence which is stretched over your heads. Remember the instability of all human things; remember it, and tremble, ye who despise the devout acknowledgement of him who disposes of the human fate! *Though ye live many years and rejoice in them all, remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.**

But after all that has been urged on this subject, I am sensible it may be objected, that many who make conscience of paying strict regard to the institutions of religion, do not appear to have derived much benefit from them. They are not, it will be said, more improved in moral conduct, and in

* Eccles. xi. 8.

the proper discharge of the several duties of life, than others who have been apparently negligent of the services of the church. On the contrary, a formal regard to these appears to be substituted by many in the room of the weightier matters of the law. — Though this should be admitted, it goes no farther than to show that human weakness, or corruption, may defeat the purpose of the most promising means of moral improvement. That a superstitious attention to external worship has too often usurped the character and supplanted the place of real virtue, will not be denied. Admonitions against so dangerous an error cannot be given too often. But because the best things have been often misapplied and abused, no argument thence arises for their being undervalued, and thrown aside. So also reason, instruction, and discipline of every kind, have been frequently perverted to bad ends; and yet their intrinsic worth and usefulness remain untouched, and acknowledged. —— Besides this, it cannot be admitted that, because religious institutions produce not all the good that might be wished, and hoped for, they therefore do no good at all. This were a rash and ill-founded conclusion. If the morals of men are not always amended by them as they ought to have been, there is reason, however, to think that they would have been worse without them. Some check is always given by them to open profligacy. Some assistance is furnished to good dispositions of heart; at least, to decency of manners. Even momentary impressions of seriousness made on the thoughtless by the solemnities of religion, are not without their fruit. They leave generally some trace behind them; and when the traces are often

renewed, they may be hoped, through the Divine blessing, to form at last a deep impression on the mind.

At the same time, I do not say that religious institutions work upon the mind like a charm; and that mere bodily attendance on them will always ensure us of some profitable effect. Let the means that are employed for the improvement of rational beings, be ever so powerful in themselves, much of their success will always depend on the manner in which they are received and applied. I shall therefore conclude my reasonings on this subject, with a few observations concerning the dispositions requisite on our part, for deriving benefit from the public ordinances of religion.

The ends for which we assemble in the house of God are two; to worship God, and to listen to religious instructions.

The public worship of God is the chief and most sacred purpose of every religious assembly of Christians. Let it here be remembered, that it is not the uttering, or the hearing of certain words, that constitutes the worship of the Almighty. It is the heart that praises or prays. If the heart accompany not the words that are spoken or heard, we *offer the sacrifice of fools*. By the inattentive thought, and the giddy and wandering eye, we profane the temple of the Lord, and turn the appearance of devotion into insult and mockery.

With regard to religious instruction, attention and reverence are unquestionably due. All religious and moral knowledge comes from God. It is a light from heaven, first transmitted to man by the original

constitution of his nature, and afterwards made to shine with fairer and fuller lustre by the revelation of the gospel in Jesus Christ. Its brightness may sometimes be stronger, and sometimes weaker, according to the mediums by which it is conveyed: but still, as far as the instructions delivered from the pulpit are illuminated by the ray from heaven, they are the truths of God, and ought to be received as such. Refinements of vain philosophy, or intricate subtilties of theological controversy, are undoubtedly not entitled to such regard. But when the great principles of natural or revealed religion are discussed; when the important doctrines of the gospel concerning the life, and sufferings, and death of our blessed Redeemer are displayed; or useful instructions regarding the regulation of life, and the proper discharge of our several duties, are the subjects brought into view; it is not then the human speaker, but the divine authority, that is to be regarded.

In the speaker, many imperfections and infirmities may be discovered. The discoveries of the Gospel are represented in Scripture, as a hidden treasure brought to light; but, by the appointment of God, *we have this treasure in earthen vessels.** It is not the spirit of curiosity that ought to bring us to church. Too often, it is to be feared, we assemble there merely as critics on the preacher; critics on his sentiments, his language, and his delivery. But, such are not the dispositions which become us on so serious an occasion. It is with humility, with fairness and candour, with an intention to improve ourselves in piety and virtue, with a view to make

* 2 Corinth. iv. 7.

personal application to our own character, that we ought to hear the word of God. —— When we enter the sacred temple, let us ever consider ourselves as creatures surrounded with darkness, seeking illumination from Heaven; as guilty creatures, imploring forgiveness from our Judge; as frail and mortal creatures, preparing for that eternal habitation into which we know not how soon we are to pass.

If with such sentiments and impressions we join in the worship of God, and the ordinances of religion, we may justly hope that they shall be accompanied to us with the divine blessing. It is the express precept of God, *not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.** *Gather together the people, men, women, and children, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.*† *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name.* — Thus hath God commanded, and he never commanded his people to seek his name in vain. For, *where two or three are gathered together in his name, our Lord hath told us, that he is in the midst of them.*‡ *God hath said, that he loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.* § *The prayer of the upright is his delight.* Both in their temporal and spiritual concerns, they may be most expected to prosper, who can say with the Psalmist in the text, *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.*

* Heb. x. 25.
† Deut. xxxi. 12.
‡ Matt. xviii. 20.
§ Ps. lxxxvii. 2.

SERMON LXII.

ON THE FASHION OF THE WORLD PASSING AWAY.

1 Cor. vii. 31.

— *The fashion of this world passeth away.*

TO *use this world* so as not to *abuse it*, is one of the most important, and at the same time one of the most difficult lessons which religion teaches. By so many desires and passions we are connected with the objects around us, that our attachment to them is always in hazard of becoming excessive and sinful. Hence religion is often employed in moderating this attachment, by rectifying our erroneous opinions, and instructing us in the proper value we ought to set on worldly things. Such was particularly the scope of the Apostle in this context. He is putting the Corinthians in mind that their *time is short;* that every thing here is transitory; and therefore, that in all the different occupations of human life, in *weeping* and *rejoicing*, and *buying* and *possessing*, they were ever to keep in view this consideration, that *the fashion of this world passeth away*. The original expression imports the figure or form under which the world presents itself to us. The meaning is, all that belongs to this visible state is continually changing. Nothing in human affairs is fixed or stable. All is in motion and fluctuation; altering its appearance every moment, and

passing into some new form. Let us meditate for a little on the serious view which is here given us of the world, in order that we may attend to the improvements which it suggests.

I. *The fashion of the world passeth away*, as the opinions, ideas, and manners of men are always changing. We look in vain for a standard to ascertain and fix any of these; in vain expect that what has been approved and established for a while, is always to endure. Principles which were of high authority among our ancestors are now exploded. Systems of philosophy which were once universally received, and taught as infallible truths, are now obliterated and forgotten. Modes of living, behaving, and employing time, the pursuits of the busy, and the entertainments of the gay, have been entirely changed. They were the offspring of fashion, the children of a day. When they had run their course, they expired; and were succeeded by other modes of living, and thinking, and acting, which the gloss of novelty recommended for a while to the public taste.

When we read an account of the manners and occupations, of the studies and opinions, even of our own countrymen, in some remote age, we seem to be reading the history of a different world from what we now inhabit. Coming downwards, through some generations, a new face of things appears. Men begin to think, and act, in a different train; and what we call refinement gradually opens. Arriving at our own times, we consider ourselves as having widely enlarged the sphere of knowledge on every

side: having formed just ideas on every subject; having attained the proper standard of manners and behaviour; and wonder at the ignorance, the uncouthness, and rusticity of our forefathers. But, alas! what appears to us so perfect shall in its turn pass away. The next race, while they shove us off the stage, will introduce their favourite discoveries and innovations; and what we now admire as the height of improvement, may in a few ages hence be considered as altogether rude and imperfect. As one wave effaces the ridge which the former had made on the sand by the sea-shore, so every succeeding age obliterates the opinions and modes of the age which had gone before it. *The fashion of the world* is ever passing away.

Let us only think of the changes which our own ideas and opinions undergo in the progress of life. One man differs not more from another, than the same man varies from himself in different periods of his age, and in different situations of fortune. In youth and in opulence, every thing appears smiling and gay. We fly as on the wings of fancy; and survey beauties wherever we cast our eye. But let some more years have passed over our heads, or let disappointments in the world have depressed our spirits; and what a change takes place! The pleasing illusions that once shone before us; the splendid fabrics that imagination had reared; the enchanting maze in which we once wandered with delight, all vanish and are forgotten. The world itself remains the same. But its form, its appearance, and aspect, is changed to our view; its *fashion*, as to us, hath *passed away*.

II. While our opinions and ideas are thus changing within, the condition of all external things is, at the same time, ever changing without us, and around us. Wherever we cast our eyes over the face of nature, or the monuments of art, we discern the marks of alteration and vicissitude. We cannot travel far upon the earth, without being presented with many a striking memorial of the changes made by time. What was once a flourishing city, is now a neglected village. Where castles and palaces stood, fallen towers and ruined walls appear. Where the magnificence of the great shone, and the mirth of the gay resounded, there, as the prophet Isaiah describes, *the owl and the raven now dwell, thorns come up, and the nettle and the bramble grow in the courts.*—— When we read the history of nations, what do we read but the history of incessant revolution and change? We behold kingdoms alternately rising and falling; peace and war taking place by turns; princes, heroes, and statesmen, coming forth in succession on the stage, attracting our attention for a little by the splendid figure they make, and then disappearing and forgotten. We see the *fashion of the world* assuming all its different forms, and, in all of them, *passing away.*

But to historical annals there is no occasion for our having recourse. Let any one who has made some progress in life, recollect only what he has beheld passing before him in his own time. We have seen our country rise triumphant among the nations; and we have seen it also humbled in its turn. We have seen in one hemisphere of the globe new dominions acquired, and in another hemisphere our old dominions lost. At home we have seen factions and

parties shift through all their different forms; and administrations, in succession, rise and fall. What were once the great themes of eager discussion and political contest, are now forgotten. Fathers recount them to their children as the tales of other times. New actors have come forth on the stage of the world. New objects have attracted the attention, and new intrigues engaged the opinions of men. New members fill the seat of justice; new ministers the temples of religion; and a new world, in short, in the course of a few years, has gradually and insensibly risen around us.

When from the public scene we turn our eye to our own private connections, the changes which have taken place in the *fashion of the world*, must touch every reflecting mind with a more tender sensibility. For where are now many of the companions of our early years; many of those with whom we first began the race of life; and whose hopes and prospects were once the same with our own? In recollecting our old acquaintance and friends, what devastations have been made by the hand of time! On the ruins of our former connections, new ones have arisen; new relations have been formed; and the circle of those among whom we live is altogether changed from what it once was. Comparing our present situation with our former condition of life; looking back to our father's house, and to the scenes of youth; remembering the friends by whom we were trained, and the family in which we grew up; who, but with inward emotion, recollects those days of former years, and is disposed to drop the silent tear, when he views *the fashion of the world* thus always *passing away!*

III. Not only our connections with all things around us change, but our own life, through all its stages and conditions, is ever passing away. How just, and how affecting is that image, employed in the sacred writings to describe the state of man, *we spend our years as a tale that is told!* * It is not to any thing great or lasting that human life is compared; not to a monument that is built, or to an inscription that is engraved; not even to a book that is written, or to a history that is recorded, but to a *tale*, which is listened to for a little; where the words are fugitive and passing, and where one incident succeeds and hangs on another, till, by insensible transitions, we are brought to the close; *a tale*, which in some passages may be amusing, in others, tedious; but whether it amuses or fatigues, is soon told and soon forgotten. Thus year steals upon us after year. Life is never standing still for a moment; but continually, though insensibly, sliding into a new form. Infancy rises up fast to childhood; childhood to youth; youth passes quickly into manhood; and the grey hair, and the faded look, are not long of admonishing us, that old age is at hand. In this course all generations run. The world is made up of unceasing rounds of transitory existence. Some generations are coming forward into being, and others hastening to leave it. The stream which carries us all along, is ever flowing with a quick current, though with a still and noiseless course. The dwelling-place of man is continually emptying, and by a fresh succession of inhabitants, continually filling anew. *The memory of man passeth away like*

* Psalm xc. 9.

the remembrance of a guest who hath tarried but one night.

As the life of man, considered in its duration, thus fleets and passes away, so, during the time it lasts, its condition is perpetually changing. It affords us nothing on which we can set up our rest; no enjoyment or possession which we can properly call our own. When we have begun to be placed in such circumstances as we desired, and wish our lives to proceed in the same agreeable tenor, how often comes some unexpected event across to disconcert all our schemes of happiness? Our health declines; our friends die; our families are scattered; something or other is not long of occurring, to show us that the wheel must turn round; *the fashion of the world must pass away.* Is there any man who dares to look to futurity with an eye of confident hope; and to say, that against a year hence, he can promise being in the same condition of health or fortune as he is at present? The seeds of change are every where sown in our state; and the very causes that seemed to promise us security, are often secretly undermining it. Great fame provokes the attacks of envy and reproach. High health gives occasion to intemperance and disease. The elevation of the mighty never fails to render their condition tottering; and that obscurity which shelters the mean, exposes them, at the same time, to become the prey of oppression. So completely is the *fashion of this world* made by Providence for change, and prepared for *passing away.* In the midst of this instability, it were some comfort, did human prosperity decay as slowly as it rises. By slow degrees, and by many

intervening steps, it rises. But one day is sufficient to scatter and bring it to nought. I might add,

IV. THAT the world itself in which we dwell, the basis of all our present enjoyments, is itself contrived for change, and designed to pass away. While the generations of men come forth in their turns, like troops of succeeding pilgrims, to act their part on this globe, the globe on which they act is tottering under their feet. It was once overflowed by a deluge. It is shaken by earthquakes; it is undermined by subterraneous fires; it carries many a mark of having suffered violent convulsions, and of tending to dissolution. Revelation informs us that there is a day approaching, in which *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise; the elements shall melt with fervent heat; and the earth and the works therein shall be burnt up.* When this destined hour arrives, the *fashion of the world* shall have finally *past away.* Immortal spirits shall then look back upon this world, as we do at present on cities and empires, which were once mighty and flourishing, but now are swept from existence, and their place is no more to be found.

I SHALL insist no longer on this representation of things. Enough has been said, to show that the *fashion of the world,* in every sense, *passes away.* Opinions and manners, public affairs and private concerns, the life of man, the conditions of fortune, and the earth itself on which we dwell, are all changing around us.—Is every thing, then, with which we are connected, passing and transitory? Is the whole state of man no more than a dream or fleeting vision? Is he brought forth to be only the child of a

day? Are we thrown into a river where all flows, and nothing stays; where we have no means of resisting the current; nor can reach any firm ground on which to rest our foot?—No, my brethren; man was not doomed to be so unhappy; nor made by his Creator so much in vain. There are three fixed and permanent objects to which I must now call your attention, as the great supports of human constancy amidst this fugitive state. Though this world changes and passes away, virtue and goodness never change; God never changes; heaven and immortality pass not away.

First, VIRTUE and goodness never change. Let opinions and manners, conditions and situations, in public and in private life, alter as they will, virtue is ever the same. It rests on the immoveable basis of Eternal Truth. Among all the revolutions of human things, it maintains its ground; ever possessing the veneration and esteem of mankind, and conferring on the heart, which enjoys it, satisfaction and peace. Consult the most remote antiquity. Look to the most savage nations of the earth. How wild and how fluctuating soever the ideas of men may have been, this opinion you will find to have always prevailed, that probity, truth, and beneficence form the honour and the excellency of man. In this, the philosopher and the savage, the warrior and the hermit, join. At this altar all have worshipped. Their offerings may have been unseemly. Their notions of virtue may have been rude, and occasionally tainted by ignorance and superstition; but the fundamental ideas of moral worth have ever remained the same.

Here then is one point of stability, affected by no vicissitudes of time and life, on which we may rest. Our fortunes may change, and our friends may die; but virtue may still be our own; and as long as this remains, we are never miserable. *Till I die I will not remove my integrity from Me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.** He who, with the holy man of old, can hold this language, may with undisturbed mind survey time flying away, life decaying, and the whole fashion of the world changing around him. He hath within himself, a source of consolation and hope, independent of all earthly objects. Every terrestrial glory sparkles only for a little, with transient brightness. But virtue shines with eternal and unalterable splendour. It derives its origin from heaven; and partakes both of the lustre, and the stability, of celestial objects. *It is the brightness of the everlasting light; the unspotted mirror of God, and the image of his goodness.*

In the *second* place, God never changes. Amidst the unceasing vicissitudes of earthly things, there remains at the head of the universe an Eternal Protector of virtue, whose *throne is established for ever.* With him, there is *no variableness, neither any shadow of turning;* no inconstancy of purpose, and no decay of wisdom or of power. We know that he loved righteousness from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to love it unalterably to the last. Foreseen by him was every revolution which the course of ages has produced. All the changes which

* Job, xxvii. 5, 6.

happen in the state of nature, or the life of men, were comprehended in his decree. How much soever worldly things may change in themselves, they are all united in his plan; they constitute one great system or whole, of which he is the Author; and which, at its final completion, shall appear to be perfect. His dominion holds together, in a continual chain, the successive variety of human events; gives stability to things that, in themselves, are fluctuating; gives constancy even to the *fashion of the world* while it is *passing away*. Wherefore, though all things change on earth, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as, with trust and hope, we look up to the Supreme Being, we rest on the *rock of ages*, and are safe amidst every change. We possess a fortress to which we can have recourse in all dangers; a refuge under all storms; *a dwelling-place in all generations.*

In the *third* and last place, Heaven and immortality pass not away. The fleeting scenes of this life are to be considered as no more than an introduction to a nobler and more permanent order of things, when man shall have attained the maturity of his being. This is what reason gave some ground to expect; what revelation as fully confirmed; and, in confirming it, has agreed with the sentiments and anticipations of the good and wise in every age. We are taught to believe, that what we now behold, is only the first stage of the life of man. We are arrived no further than the threshold; we dwell as in the outer courts of existence. Here, tents only are pitched; tabernacles erected for the sojourners of a day. But in the region of eternity, all is great,

stable, and unchanging. There, the *mansions* of the just are prepared; there, the *city which hath foundations* is built; there is established, the kingdom *which cannot be moved.* Here every thing is in stir and fluctuation; because here good men continue not, but pass onward in the course of being. There, all is serene, steady, and orderly; because there remaineth the final *rest of the people of God.* Here, all is corrupted by our folly and guilt; and of course must be transient and vain. But there, purchased by the death, and secured by the resurrection, of the Son of God, is an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* There reigns that tranquillity which is never troubled. There shines that sun which never sets. There flows that river of pleasures, which is always unruffled and pure. Looking forward to those divine habitations, the changes of the present world disappear to the eye of faith; and a good man becomes ashamed of suffering himself to be dejected by what is so soon to pass away.

Such are the objects you ought to oppose to the transient *fashion of the world;* Virtue, and God, and Heaven. Fixing your regard on these, you will have no reason to complain of the lot of man, or the world's mutability. — The design of the preceding representation which I gave of the world, was not to indulge vain declamation; to raise fruitless melancholy; or to throw an unnecessary cloud over human life: But to show the moderation requisite in our attachment to the world; and at the same time, to point out the higher objects both of attention and consolation which religion affords.——Passing and changeable as all human things are, among them,

however, we must at present act our part; to them we must return from religious meditation. They are not below the regard of any Christian; for they form the scene which Providence has appointed at present for his activity, and his duty. Trials and dangers they may often present to him; but amidst these he will safely hold his course, if, when engaged in worldly affairs, he keep in view those divine objects which I have been setting before him. Let him ever retain connection with Virtue, and God, and Heaven. By them let his conduct be regulated, and his constancy supported. So shall he *use this world* without *abusing it.* He shall neither droop under its misfortunes, nor be vainly elated by its advantages; but through all its changes shall carry an equal and steady mind; and in the end shall receive the accomplishment of the promise of Scripture, that though *the world passeth away and the lust thereof, he that doeth the will of God shall abide for ever.* *

* 1 John, ii. 17.

SERMON LXIII.

On Tranquillity of Mind.

Psalm xv. 5.

— He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

TRANQUILLITY of mind, or, in the words of the text, a mind *not moved* or disquieted by the accidents of life, is undoubtedly one of the greatest blessings that we can possess on earth. It is here mentioned as the reward of the man, whose character had been described in this Psalm, as leading a virtuous life, and discharging his duty towards God and his neighbour. It is indeed the ultimate aim, to which the wishes of the wise and reflecting have ever been directed, that with a mind undisturbed by anxieties, cares, and fears, they might pass their days in a pleasing serenity. They justly concluded that, by enjoying themselves in peace, they would enjoy, to the greatest advantage, all the comforts of life that came within their reach.

This happy tranquillity, the multitude conceive to be most readily attainable by means of wealth, or, at least, of an easy fortune; which they imagine would set them above all the ordinary disturbances of life. That it has some effect for this purpose, cannot be denied. Poverty and straitened circumstances are often inconsistent with tranquillity. To be destitute

of those conveniences that suit our rank in the world; to be burdened with anxiety about making provision for every day which passes over our head; instead of bringing comfort to a family who look up to us for aid, to behold ourselves surrounded with their wants and complaints, are circumstances which cannot fail to give much uneasiness to every feeling mind. To take measures, therefore, for attaining a competent fortune, by laudable means, is wise and proper. Entire negligence of our affairs and indifference about our worldly circumstances, is, for the most part, the consequence of some vice or some folly. — At the same time I must observe, that the attainment of opulence is no certain method of attaining tranquillity. Embarrassments and vexations often attend it; and long experience has shown, that tranquillity is far from being always found among the rich. Nay, the higher that men rise in the world, the greater degrees of power and distinction which they acquire, they are often the farther removed from internal peace. The world affords so many instances of miseries abounding in the higher ranks of life, that it were needless to enlarge on a topic so generally known and admitted.

Assuming it, therefore, for an undoubted truth, that the mere possession of the goods of fortune may be consistent with the want of inward tranquillity, we must look around for other more certain grounds of it. We must enquire whether any line of conduct can be pointed out, which, independent of external situation in the world, shall tend to make us easy in mind; shall either bestow or aid, that tranquillity which all men desire. The remain-

ing part of this discourse shall be employed in suggesting, with great plainness of speech, such directions as appear to me most material on this important subject.

THE *first* direction which I have to suggest is, that we imitate the character of the man who is described in this Psalm, as *walking uprightly, working righteousness, and speaking the truth, as he thinketh in his heart;* that we study to preserve a clear conscience, and to lead a virtuous and honourable, at least an inoffensive and innocent life. Of such a man only it can be said, that *doing these things, he shall never be moved.* So great is the power of conscience over every human being, that the remembrance of crimes never fails to overthrow tranquillity of mind. Be assured, that he who defrauds his neighbour, who has ensnared the innocent, has violated his trust, or betrayed his friend, shall never enjoy within himself undisturbed quiet. His evil deeds will at times recur to his thoughts, like ghosts rising up in black array before him to haunt his couch. Even the sense of a foolish and trifling conduct; of a life passed in idleness and dissipation; by which, though a man has not been guilty of great crimes, he has, however, wasted his substance, mispent his time, and brought upon himself just reproach; even this, I say, is sufficient to create much uneasiness and disquiet to the heart. Let him, therefore, who wishes to enjoy tranquillity, study, above all things, to act an irreproachable part. With comfort he will rest his head on his pillow at night, when he is conscious that throughout the day he has been doing his duty towards God and

man; when none of the transactions of that day come back, in painful remembrance, to upbraid him. To this testimony of a good conscience, let him be able,

In the *second* place, to join humble trust in the favour of God. As, after the best endeavours we can use, no man's behaviour will be entirely faultless, it is essential to peace of mind, that we have some ground for hope in the Divine mercy, that, through the merits of Jesus Christ, our defects shall be forgiven, and grace be shown us by Heaven. This includes all the duties of faith and repentance that are required by the gospel; the faithful discharge of which duties is absolutely necessary for delivering us from those fears of another world, which, if not allayed, are sufficient to banish all tranquillity from the heart. Our religious principles must at the same time be sound and pure; and carefully preserved from the taint of superstition, whose gloomy horrors, taking possession of weak and ill-informed minds, convert what they mistake for religion, into a source of misery.—Moreover, it is necessary, that we be able to place trust in God, not only as our future judge, but as the present Governor of human affairs. So uncertain is the continuance of every earthly comfort, that he who reposes no confidence in the Supreme Disposer of events, must be often disquieted and dejected. He alone possesses firm tranquillity, who, amidst all human vicissitudes, looks up, with settled trust, to an Almighty Ruler, as to one under whose conduct he is safe. To him alone belongs that happy privilege, described by the

Psalmist: *He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.* *

I have pointed out the primary and essential foundations of tranquillity; virtuous conduct, good principles, and pious dispositions. At the same time, a man may be both pious and virtuous, and yet through some defects in the management of his mind and temper, may not possess that happy serenity and self-enjoyment, which ought to be the portion of virtue and piety. Instances of this will occur to every one who is acquainted with the world. We too often behold persons, whose principles, and whose moral conduct, are in the main unexceptionable, leading an uncomfortable life; through fretfulness of temper, peevishness of manners, or sullenness of disposition. There is, therefore, some discipline to be studied; there are some subsidiary parts of character to be attended to, in order to give piety and virtue their full effect for conferring tranquillity. To the consideration of these secondary means I now proceed. Let me then advise you,

In the *third* place, to attend to the culture and improvement of your minds. A fund of useful knowledge, and a stock of ideas, afford much advantage for the enjoyment of tranquillity. I do not mean that every man must study to become deeply learned. The situation of many would not allow it. The taste, and the habits of others, prevent it. But what I mean is, that every man who wishes to lead a comfortable life should provide for himself, as much as he can, by means of observation, reading,

* Psalm cxii. 7.

and reflecting, a large field of useful thoughts. In a mind absolutely vacant, tranquillity is seldom found. The vacancy too often will be filled up by bad desires and passions. Whereas the mind of a wise man is a kingdom to itself. In his lonely or melancholy hours, he finds always resources within himself, to which he can turn for relief. As there are many occasions when external objects afford no pleasure, it is only by being able to rest on the entertainments afforded to himself by his mind, that any one can pass his days with self-enjoyment. Let me recommend for the same purpose,

In the *fourth* place, that we be always careful to provide proper employment for our time. Regular industry and labour, with intervals of ease, is perhaps the state most conducive of any to tranquillity. If our station give no call to industry, it will be profitable that we study to have some end or object in view, to which our attention shall be directed. Relaxation from intense or incessant pursuit, is requisite for comfort. But if relaxation degenerate into total idleness, it becomes in a high degree adverse to tranquillity. Every man by his nature is formed, more or less, for action. In a mind that is entirely quiescent, and that has no object to put it into motion, instead of self-enjoyment, there will be constant languor, tediousness, and misery. Life stagnates in such a situation, like a pool of dead waters; and the man becomes a burden to himself. Violent and dangerous pursuits, which distract and embroil those who are engaged in them, I cannot be understood to recommend. Every one sees how foreign these are to a state of tranquillity. But, in the ordi-

nary tenor of calm and easy life, I would advise every one to have some end before him; some object which shall bring the mind into action, and fill up the vacuities of time. Provided the object be innocent and of no unsuitable or degrading nature, it may answer this purpose, though it should not be in itself of high importance. It is better for the mind to have some determinate direction given it, than to be always left floating, as it were, in empty space. —— But about whatever objects we are employed, it is still more material to tranquillity, that, in the

Fifth place, we learn to govern our passions. These are the most frequent disturbers of our peace. Necessary as their impulse is to give activity to the mind, yet if they are not kept in subordination to reason, they speedily throw all things into confusion. Such of them as belong to the malignant and unsocial class evidently tend to produce vexation and disquiet. Against suffering these to gain possession of the heart, admonition is scarcely necessary. But I must admonish you, that even those which are accounted of an innocent nature, and which therefore may lay hold of virtuous minds, if they obtain the entire mastery, are sufficient to overthrow the tranquillity of life. Let every one, therefore, who values that tranquillity, study to retain moderation and self-command, even in the midst of passions which have a fair and bland appearance. He will find that the gratification of any one of them, compensates not that perpetual slavery to which it will reduce him, when it becomes inordinate.

I have farther to admonish you, that this self-command is particularly necessary in all that relates to

habitual temper. Even where strong passions are out of the question, those slight emotions which ruffle or sour the temper, are sufficient, by their frequent recurrence, to poison all self-enjoyment. He, who would possess a tranquil state, must, above all things, cultivate calmness and gentleness of disposition. He ought especially to cultivate it in that society, whether domestic or social, with which he has most frequent intercourse. We all know, that there are thousands, who in public, and in formal companies, appear to be all gentleness and sweetness, but who, at home, and among their nearest relations, give vent, with freedom, to the most harsh and peevish dispositions. Such persons are not likely to enjoy much real comfort. For it is in the daily and familiar intercourse of life, that temper chiefly exerts its power, either for promoting or for disturbing the tranquillity of our days. On occasions when men come closest together, if, instead of meeting in smooth contact, they rub and grate on one another, the feelings produced on both sides are of the most offensive and displeasing kind. Nothing can be assumed as a more certain axiom, than that he who allows either inordinate passions, or a cross temper, to govern him, must, though he should possess all that flourishing fortune can bestow, be a stranger to tranquillity.

In the *sixth* place, let me advise you never to expect too much from the world. High hopes, and florid views, are great enemies to tranquillity. When rashly indulged, they are constantly producing disappointments. Their indulgence, in the mean time, occasions discontent with our present situation; and

he who is discontented cannot be happy. One of the first lessons, both of religion and wisdom, is, to moderate our expectations and hopes; and not to set forth on the voyage of life like men who expect to be always carried forward with a favourable gale. Let your views be suited to your rank and station in the world; and never soar fantastically beyond them. Content yourselves with sober pleasures, and form your relish to them. Be thankful when you are free from pain, though you be not in the midst of high enjoyment. Be satisfied, if the path you tread be easy and smooth, though it be not strewed with flowers. Human life admits not of continued pleasure: nor is it always rendered happy by great exaltation. Remember, that it is a middle region, which is the native station of tranquillity. It neither aspires to those heights of the atmosphere where the thunder is formed, nor creeps always on the ground. Affect not, on every occasion, to put yourselves forward. Be content to retire sometimes into the shade; and allow others to take their proper place.——It will be easily seen, that I speak not now to the ambitious and aspiring; but to those who value tranquillity more than splendid appearance in the world.

Such persons I also advise, while they expect not too much from the world, neither, also, to form too high expectations from the characters of those on whose friendship they rest, and with whom it is their lot to be connected, either in social or domestic relations. If you have looked for perfection any where, you will find yourself disappointed; and the consequence of this disappointment will be, that friendship will cool, and disgust succeed. If you wish to

enjoy comfort in any of your connections, take your fellow-creatures as they are, and look for their imperfections to appear. You know you have your own; bear with those of others, as you expect that they are to bear with you. As no one is without his failings, few also are void of amiable qualities. Select for your companions, those who have the greatest share of such qualities; and value them accordingly. — In a word, make the best of this world as you find it. Reckon both on the state of human life, and on the society of men, as mixed and chequered with good and evil. Carrying always in your eye such views of things, you will be best formed to those equal spirits, and that reasonable disposition of mind, which make the basis of tranquillity. I shall only add, as my

SEVENTH, and last advice on this subject, to mix retreat with the active business of the world, and to cultivate habits of serious thought and recollection. I before advised those who are not particularly engaged in active life, to form to themselves some object of pursuit, in order to furnish proper employment to time and thought. But the great multitude of men are in a different situation. Industry is required of them; business and cares press; and active pursuits occupy their closest attention. He who, in this situation, pours himself forth incessantly on the world, cannot escape partaking much of its disturbance and trouble. Amidst bustle, intrigue, and dissension, he must pass many an uneasy hour. Here an enemy encounters him; there a rival meets him. A suspicious friend alarms him one hour; an ungrateful one provokes him the next. I do not

recommend, that, for these reasons, he who studies tranquillity should retire from all public business, and forsake the haunts of men. This were the retreat of a monk, not of a good and a wise man. Tranquillity were too dearly purchased by the neglect of those duties which belong to a man, and a Christian. Nor indeed in absolute seclusion from the world, is tranquillity ever found. On the contrary, when the human mind is cut off from those employments for which it was designed by nature and Providence, it preys on itself, and engenders its own misery. Tranquillity is always most likely to be attained, when the business of the world is tempered with thoughtful and serious retreat. *Commune with your hearts on your bed, and be still.* Leaving this world to itself, let there be seasons which you devote to yourselves, and to God. Reflection and meditation allay the workings of many unquiet passions; and place us at a distance from the tumults of the world. When the mind has either been ruffled or cast down, an intercourse with God and heaven we find a sanctuary to which we can retreat. In the hours of contemplation and devotion, a good man enjoys himself in peace. He beholds nobler objects than what worldly men can behold. He assumes a higher character. He listens to the voice of nature and of God; and from this holy sanctuary comes forth with a mind fortified against the little disturbances of the world. Such habits, therefore, cannot be too much recommended to the lovers of tranquillity, as powerful subsidiary means for attaining that happy state.

I HAVE thus pointed out what appears to me the discipline of religion and wisdom for tranquillity of

mind. *He that doeth these things shall never be moved.* — During the early periods of life, vivid sensations of pleasure are the sole objects thought worthy of pursuit. Mere ease and calmness are despised, as the portion of the aged only and the feeble. Some longer acquaintance with the world, with its disappointed hopes and fallacious pleasures, teaches almost all men, by degrees, to wish for tranquillity and peace. But you must not imagine that these are blessings which will drop on men of their own accord as soon as they begin to desire them. No: the thoughtless and the profligate will ever remain strangers to them. They will remain the sport of every accident that occurs to derange their minds, and disturb their life. — The three great enemies to tranquillity are, Vice, Superstition, and Idleness: Vice, which poisons and disturbs the mind with bad passions; Superstition, which fills it with imaginary terrors; Idleness, which loads it with tediousness and disgust. It is only by following the path which eternal wisdom has pointed out, that we can arrive at the blessed temple of tranquillity, and obtain a station there: By doing, or at least endeavouring to do, our duty to God and man; by acquiring a humble trust in the mercy and favour of God through Jesus Christ; by cultivating our minds, and properly employing our time and thoughts; by governing our passions and our temper; by correcting all unreasonable expectations from the world and from men; and, in the midst of worldly business, habituating ourselves to calm retreat and serious recollection. — By such means as these, it may be hoped, that, through the Divine blessing, our days

shall flow in a stream as unruffled as the human state admits. *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. But the work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever.* *

* Isaiah, xxxii. 17.

SERMON LXIV.

On the Misfortunes of Men being chargeable on themselves.

Proverbs, xix. 3.

The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.

HOW many complaints do we hear from every quarter, of the misery and distress that fill the world? In these the high and the low, the young and the aged, join; and since the beginning of time no topic has been more fertile of declamation than the vanity and vexation which man is appointed to suffer. But are we certain that this vexation, and this vanity, is altogether to be ascribed to the appointment of Heaven? Is there no ground to suspect that man himself is the chief and immediate author of his own sufferings? What the text plainly suggests is, that it is common for men to complain groundlessly of Providence; that they are prone to accuse God for the evils of life, when in reason they ought to accuse themselves; and that after their *foolishness* hath *perverted their way*, and made them undergo the consequences of their own misconduct, they impiously *fret in heart against the Lord.* This is the doctrine which I now propose to illustrate, in order to silence the sceptic, and to check a repining and irreligious spirit. I shall for this end make

some observations, first, on the external, and next, upon the internal, condition of man, and then conclude with such serious and useful improvement as the subject will naturally suggest.

I. Let us consider the external condition of man. We find him placed in a world where he has by no means the disposal of the events that happen. Calamities sometimes befal the worthiest and the best, which it is not in their power to prevent, and where nothing is left them, but to acknowledge and to submit to the high hand of Heaven. For such visitations of trial, many good and wise reasons can be assigned, which the present subject leads me not to discuss. But though those unavoidable calamities make a part, yet they make not the chief part, of the vexations and sorrows that distress human life. A multitude of evils beset us, for the source of which we must look to another quarter. — No sooner has any thing in the health, or in the circumstances of men, gone cross to their wish, than they begin to talk of the unequal distribution of the good things of this life; they envy the condition of others; they repine at their own lot, and fret against the Ruler of the world.

Full of these sentiments, one man pines under a broken constitution. But let us ask him, whether we can, fairly and honestly, assign no cause for this but the unknown decree of Heaven. Has he duly valued the blessing of health, and always observed the rules of virtue and sobriety? Has he been moderate in his life, and temperate in all his pleasures? If now he be only paying the price of his former, perhaps his forgotten indulgences, has he any title to

complain, as if he were suffering unjustly? Were you to survey the chambers of sickness and distress, you would find them peopled with the victims of intemperance and sensuality, and with the children of vicious indolence and sloth. Among the thousands who languish there, you will find the proportion of innocent sufferers to be small. You would see faded youth, premature old age, and the prospect of an untimely grave, to be the portion of multitudes who, in one way or other, have brought those evils on themselves; while yet these martyrs of vice and folly have the assurance to arraign the hard fate of man, and to *fret against the Lord.*

But you, perhaps, complain of hardships of another kind; of the injustice of the world; of the poverty which you suffer, and the discouragements under which you labour; of the crosses and disappointments of which your life has been doomed to be full.——Before you give too much scope to your discontent, let me desire you to reflect impartially upon your past train of life. Have not sloth, or pride, or ill-temper, or sinful passions, misled you often from the path of sound and wise conduct? Have you not been wanting to yourselves in improving those opportunities which Providence offered you, for bettering and advancing your state? If you have chosen to indulge your humour or your taste, in the gratifications of indolence or pleasure, can you complain, because others, in preference to you, have obtained those advantages which naturally belong to useful labours, and honourable pursuits? Have not the consequences of some false steps, into which your passions or your pleasures have betrayed you, pursued you through much of your life; tainted,

perhaps, your character, involved you in embarrassments, or sunk you into neglect? —— It is an old saying, that every man is the artificer of his own fortune in the world. It is certain that the world seldom turns wholly against a man, unless through his own fault. *Godliness is*, in general, *profitable unto all things.* Virtue, diligence, and industry, joined with good temper and prudence, have ever been found the surest road to prosperity; and where men fail of attaining it, their want of success is far oftener owing to their having deviated from that road, than to their having encountered insuperable bars in it. Some, by being too artful, forfeit the reputation of probity. Some, by being too open, are accounted to fail in prudence. Others, by being fickle and changeable, are distrusted by all. —— The case commonly is, that men seek to ascribe their disappointments to any cause, rather than to their own misconduct; and when they can devise no other cause, they lay them to the charge of Providence. Their folly leads them into vices; their vices into misfortunes; and in their misfortunes they *fret against the Lord.* They are doubly unjust towards God. In their prosperity, they are apt to ascribe their success to their own diligence, rather than to God's blessing; and in their adversity, they impute their distresses to his Providence, not to their own misbehaviour. Whereas the truth is the very reverse of this. *Every good and every perfect gift cometh from above;* and of evil and misery, man is the author to himself.

When, from the condition of individuals, we look abroad to the public state of the world, we meet with more proofs of the truth of this assertion. We see

great societies of men torn in pieces by intestine dissensions, tumults, and civil commotions. We see mighty armies going forth, in formidable array, against each other, to cover the earth with blood, and to fill the air with the cries of widows and orphans. Sad evils these are, to which this miserable world is exposed. —— But are these evils, I beseech you, to be imputed to God? Was it he who sent forth slaughtering armies into the field, or who filled the peaceful city with massacres and blood? Are these miseries any other than the bitter fruit of men's violent and disorderly passions? Are they not clearly to be traced to the ambition and vices of princes, to the quarrels of the great, and to the turbulence of the people? —— Let us lay them entirely out of the account, in thinking of Providence; and let us think only of the *foolishness of men.* Did man controul his passions, and form his conduct according to the dictates of wisdom, humanity, and virtue, the earth would no longer be desolated by cruelty; and human societies would live in order, harmony, and peace. In those scenes of mischief and violence which fill the world, let man behold, with shame, the pictures of his vices, his ignorance and folly. Let him be humbled by the mortifying view of his own *perverseness;* but let not *his heart fret against the Lord.* —— From the external condition, let us proceed,

II. To consider the internal state of man. It is certain that much disquiet and misery may be found there, although his outward condition appear undisturbed and easy. As far as this inward disquietude arises from the stings of conscience, and the horrors

of guilt, there can be no doubt of its being self-created misery; which it is altogether impossible to impute to Heaven. But even when great crimes and deep remorse are not the occasions of torment, how often is poison infused into the most flourishing conditions of fortune, by the follies and the passions of the prosperous? We see them peevish and restless; corrupted with luxury, and enervated by ease; impatient of the smallest disappointment; oppressed with low spirits, and complaining of every thing around them. How many *Hamans*, *Hazaels*, and *Herods*, are there in the world, who, from what they suffer within, pass their days in more vexation and misery, than they who undergo the hardships of poverty? Dare such men, in their most discontented moments, charge the providence of Heaven with miseries of their own procuring? Providence had put into their hands the fairest opportunity of passing their life with comfort. But they themselves blasted every comfort that was offered; and verified the prediction, that *the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.**

As it is man's own *foolishness* which ruins his prosperity, we must not omit to remark, that it is the same cause which aggravates and embitters his adversity. That you suffer from the external afflictions of the world, may often be owing to God's appointment; but when, in the midst of these, you also suffer from the disorders of your mind and passions, this is owing to yourselves; and there are those inward disorders which add the severest sting to external afflictions. Many are the resources of a

* Prov. i. 32.

good and a wise man, under all the disasters of life. In the midst of them, it is always in his power to enjoy peace of mind, and hope in God. He may suffer; but under suffering he will not sink, as long as all is sound within. But when the spirit has been wounded by guilt and folly, its wounds open, and bleed afresh, upon every blow that is received from the world. The mind becomes sensible and sore to the slightest injuries of fortune; and a small reverse is felt as an insupportable calamity.

On the whole, the farther you search into human life, and the more you observe the manners and the conduct of men, you will be the more convinced of this great truth, that of the distresses which abound in the world, we are the chief authors. Among the multitudes who are, at this day, bewailing their condition and lot, it will be found to hold, of far the greater part, that they are reaping the *fruit of their own doings; their iniquities are reproving them, and their backslidings correcting them.* Unattainable objects foolishly pursued, intemperate passions nourished, vicious pleasures and desires indulged, God, and God's holy laws forgotten; these, these are the great scourges of the world; the great causes of the life of man being so embroiled and unhappy. God hath ordained our state on earth to be a mixed and imperfect state. We have ourselves to blame for its becoming an insupportable one. If it bring forth nothing to us but vexation and vanity, we have sown the seeds of that vanity and vexation; and as we have sown, we must reap.—I now proceed to make improvement of those truths which we have been considering.

In the *first* place, let us be taught to look upon sin as the source of all our miseries. It may sometimes assume the gentler names of folly, irregularity, or levity; but under whatever form it appears, it always imports a deviation from that sacred law which ought to regulate our conduct. It is still *the root that beareth gall and wormwood* *; and in exact proportion to the quantity of this poisonous weed, which we ourselves have infused into our cup, we must expect to drink the waters of bitterness. If the *foolishness of man* did not *pervert his ways*, his heart would have no occasion to *fret against the Lord*. He would enjoy competent satisfaction in every situation of life; and, under its unavoidable evils, would derive consolation from religion and virtue. —— Indeed, of every evil which we now endure, of those evils which we look upon to be the appointment of Providence, as well as of others, sin is ultimately the cause; as it was man's revolt from God, which gave rise originally to those evils, and which rendered the chastisements we undergo, in this state of discipline, necessary, even for the *sons of God*. —— But at present, we confine our observation to those miseries of which men are the immediate procurers to themselves; and from them alone, we find sufficient reason to consider sin as the capital foe to man; as the great troubler and disturber of his life. To Providence, then, let us look up with reverence. On sin let our indignation be vented; and, what is of more consequence, against sin and all its approaches, let our utmost caution be em-

* Deut. xxix. 18.

ployed. As we proceed through the different paths of life, let us accustom ourselves to beware of sin, as the hidden snake lurking among the grass, from whose fatal touch we must fly in haste, if we would not experience its sting. —— Too many have no just apprehensions of this danger. *Fools*, said the wise man, *make a mock at sin.* A fool indeed he must be, who dares to think lightly of it. He shews not only the depravity of his heart, but, what perhaps he will be more ashamed to be charged with, he shews his ignorance of the world. He shews that he knows not, he understands not, even his worldly interest, nor the interest and happiness of human society.

In the *second* place, let us learn from what has been set forth, one of the most awful and important of all truths, the reality of a Divine government exercised over the world. Blind must that man be who discerns not the most striking marks of it, in the doctrine which has been under our review. If there be a sceptic, who contends that unrestrained liberty in the gratification of desire is given to man; that, in the sight of his Creator, all actions are equal; and that no rule of moral conduct hath been prescribed, or by any penalty enforced; in order to confute such a man, we have not recourse to reasonings, but simply appeal to plain and obvious facts. We bid him look only to the life of man; and take notice how every vice is, by the constitution of things, connected with misery. We bid him trace the history of any one, with whose conduct he had particular occasion to be acquainted; and observe, whether the chief misfortunes which pursued him were not brought upon him by his own misbehaviour.

We bid him remark in the history of nations whether public virtue has not always exalted them; and whether licentiousness and crimes have not paved the way for their ruin. These are testimonies to the truth of religion which cannot by any sophistry be evaded. This is a voice, which speaks its warnings loud and strong to every heart.

The system upon which the Divine government at present proceeds, plainly is, that men's *own wickedness* should be appointed to *correct them;* that sinners should *be snared in the work of their hands, and sunk in the pit which themselves had digged; that the backslider in heart should be filled with his own ways.* —— Of all the plans which could have been devised for the government of the world, this approves itself to reason, as the wisest and most worthy of God; so to frame the constitution of things, that the Divine laws should in a manner execute themselves, and carry their sanctions in their own bosom. When the vices of men require punishment to be inflicted, the Almighty is at no loss for ministers of justice. A thousand instruments of vengeance are at his command; innumerable arrows are always in his quiver. But such is the profound wisdom of his plan, that no peculiar interposals of power are requisite. He has no occasion to step from his throne, and to interrupt the order of nature. With that majesty and solemnity which befits Omnipotence, He pronounces, *Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone.* * He leaves transgressors to their own guilt, and punishment follows of course. Their sins do the work of justice. They lift the scourge; and with every stroke which they inflict on the criminal, they mix this

* Hosea, iv. 17.

severe admonition, that as he is only reaping the fruit of his own actions, he deserves all that he suffers.——From what has been said, I might take occasion,

In the *third* place, to shew the injustice of our charging Providence with a promiscuous and unequal distribution of its favours among the good and the bad. That unequal distribution takes place in appearance only, not in reality. The whole conduct of Providence sufficiently marks, which of those classes of men it blesses and protects. The prosperity of sinners is no more than a deceitful show. The great materials of happiness are provided for the virtuous; and *evil* never fails to *pursue the wicked.* I shall close the discourse with observing,

In the *fourth* and last place, the necessity which plainly arises from our present condition of looking up to God for direction and aid in the conduct of life. The result of the whole doctrine I have now delivered is, that man's happiness or misery is, in a great measure, put into his own hands. In vain he complains of Providence. If his *heart fret against the Lord,* it is only because *his foolishness hath perverted his way:* for on himself, and his own behaviour, it depends, to be free of those miseries which harass the wicked.—But, alas! when we say, that this depends upon man, on what uncertain ground do we place his security? Is man, when left to himself, equal to this high trust that is reposed in him, this important charge that is committed to him, of attaining happiness, by wise and irreproachable conduct? Inconstant as he is in virtue, variable in his resolutions, soft and yielding in his nature to a thousand temptations; how

shall he guide himself through such slippery and dangerous paths as those of human life; where many hidden precipices surround him; many false lights lead him astray; and where the consequence of every step he takes may be destruction and ruin?—Thankful let us be to Heaven, that, in this situation, a merciful guide stretches out his hand to aid us; that a celestial light shines upon us from above; that a Divine Spirit is promised to illuminate and strengthen us. Let us humbly request of Heaven, that this Spirit of the Almighty may ever be our guide; never presumptuously trusting in our own wisdom, but listening attentively to the voice of God; and *in all our ways acknowledging Him* who only can *direct our steps.*—Upon the whole, let us hold fast the persuasion of these fundamental truths;—that, in all his dispensations, God is just and good; that the cause of all the troubles we suffer is in ourselves, not in Him; that virtue is the surest guide to a happy life; that he who forsakes this guide, enters upon the path of death; but that he who *walketh uprightly, walketh surely;* and that he who *keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.*

SERMON LXV.

On Integrity as the Guide of Life.

Proverbs, xi. 3.

The integrity of the upright shall guide them.—

RIGHTEOUSNESS and sin are, in this book of Proverbs, frequently contrasted with each other, and the advantages of the former displayed. The righteous man is shewn to be *more excellent than his neighbour*, as *the ways in which he walks are ways of pleasantness*, while *the way of transgressors is hard*. Honour is represented as attending the one, while shame is the portion of the other. The path of the one leads to life; that of the other to destruction. In the text, an advantage of righteousness is specified, which is not commonly attended to, and which some will not readily allow that it possesses. We are told by the wise man, that it affords light and direction to conduct, and will prove our best guide through all the intricacies of life. *The integrity of the upright shall guide them;* or, as it is added, to the same purpose, in a following verse, *the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way.* There are many who will admit, that integrity is an amiable quality; that it is entitled to much respect, and in most cases ought to influence our behaviour; who nevertheless are unwilling to allow it the chief place in the direction of their worldly conduct. They hold that a certain artful

sagacity, founded upon knowledge of the world, is the best conductor of every one who would be a successful adventurer in life; and that a strict attention to integrity, as his only guide, would often lead him into danger and distress. In opposition to tenets of this kind, I now purpose to show that, amidst all perplexities and dangers, there is no guide we can choose so safe, and so successful on the whole, as the integrity of an upright mind; and that, upon every trying occasion, principles of probity and honour will conduct a good man through life with more advantage, than if he were to act upon the most refined system of worldly wisdom.

It will not take much time to delineate the character of the man of integrity, as by its nature it is a plain one, and easily understood. He is one who makes it his constant rule to follow the road of duty according as the word of God, and the voice of his conscience, point it out to him.

He is not guided merely by affections, which may sometimes give the colour of virtue to a loose and unstable character. The upright man is guided by a fixed principle of mind, which determines him to esteem nothing but what is honourable, and to abhor whatever is base and unworthy in moral conduct. Hence you find him ever the same; at all times, the trusty friend, the affectionate relation, the conscientious man of business, the pious worshipper, the public-spirited citizen. He assumes no borrowed appearance. He seeks no mask to cover him; for he acts no studied part; but he is in truth what he appears to be, full of truth, candour, and humanity. In all his pursuits, he knows no part but the fair and

direct one; and would much rather fail of success, than attain it by reproachful means. He never shews you a smiling countenance, while he meditates evil against you in his heart. He never praises you among your friends; and then joins in traducing you among your enemies. You will never find one part of his character at variance with another. In his manners, he is simple and unaffected; in all his proceedings open and consistent. — Such is the man of integrity spoken of in the text. Let us now proceed to show, in what manner, and with what effect, integrity serves for the guide of his life.

Every one who has begun to make any progress in the world, will be sensible, that to conduct himself in human affairs with wisdom and propriety, is often a matter of no small difficulty. Amidst that variety of characters, of jarring dispositions, and of interfering interests, which take place among those with whom we have intercourse, we are frequently at a stand as to the part most prudent for us to choose. Ignorant of what is passing in the breasts of those around us, we can form no more than doubtful conjectures concerning the events that are likely to happen. They may take some turn altogether different from the course in which we have imagined they were to run, and according to which we had formed our plans. The slightest incident often shoots out into important consequences, of which we were not aware. The labyrinth becomes so intricate, that the most sagacious can lay hold on no clue to guide him through it: He finds himself embarrassed, and at a loss how to act. — In public and in private life, in managing our own concerns, and in directing

those of others, the doubt started by the wise man frequently occurs; *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* While thus fatigued with conjecture, we remain perplexed and undetermined in our choice; we are at the same time pulled to different sides, by the various emotions which belong to our nature. On one hand, pleasure allures us to what is agreeable; on the other, interest weighs us down towards what seems gainful. Honour attracts us towards what is splendid; and indolence inclines us to what is easy. In the consultations which we hold with our own mind, concerning our conduct, how often are we thus divided within ourselves; puzzled by the uncertainty of future events, and distracted by the contest of different inclinations?

It is in such situations as these, that the principle of integrity interposes to give light and direction. While worldly men fluctuate in the midst of those perplexities which I have described, the virtuous man has one Oracle, to which he resorts in every dubious case, and whose decisions he holds to be infallible. He consults his conscience. He listens to the voice of God. Were it only on a few occasions that this Oracle could be consulted, its value would be less. But it is a mistake to imagine, that its Responses are seldom given. Hardly is there any material transaction whatever in human life, any important question that holds us in suspense as to practice, but the difference between right and wrong will show itself; and the principle of integrity will, if we listen to it impartially, give a clear decision. Whenever the mind is divided within itself, conscience is seldom or never neutral. There is always one side or other to which it leans. There is always

one scale of the balance, into which it throws the weight of *some virtue, or some praise;* of something that is *just and true, lovely, honest, and of good report.* These are the forms, which rise to the observation of the upright man. By others they may be unseen, or overlooked; but in his eye, the lustre of virtue out-shines all other brightness. Wherever this pole-star directs him, he steadily holds his course. —— Let the issue of that course be ever so uncertain; let his friends differ from him in opinion; let his enemies clamour; he is not moved; his purpose is fixed. He asks but one question of his heart, What is the most worthy and honourable part? What is the part most becoming the station which he possesses, the character which he wishes to bear, the expectations which good men entertain of him? Being once decided as to this, he hesitates no more. He shuts his ears against every solicitation. He pursues the direct line of integrity, without *turning either to the right hand or to the left.* "It is "the Lord who calleth. Him I follow. Let him "order what seemeth good in his sight." —— It is in this manner that the *integrity of the upright* acts as *their guide.*

But as, upon a superficial view, it may appear hazardous to place ourselves entirely under such a guide, let us now proceed to consider what can be said in defence of this plan of conduct, and what advantages serve to recommend it.

In the *first* place, I affirm, that the guidance of integrity is the safest under which we can be placed; that the road in which it leads us is, upon the whole, the freest from dangers. Perfect immunity from

danger is not to be expected in this life. We can choose no path, in which we may not meet with disappointments and misfortunes. Our life, at the best, is a pilgrimage, and perils surround it. Against these perils, the men of the world imagine that craft and dexterity furnish the best defence; and if, in any instance, they over-reach the upright, they consider it as a manifest decision in favour of their plan. But, instead of resting on a few instances, let us take an extensive survey of the course of human affairs. Let us enquire who the persons are that, in all the different lines of life, have gone through the world with most success; and we shall find, that the men of probity and honour form by far the most considerable part of the list; we shall find that men of plain understanding, acting upon fair and direct views, have much oftener prospered, than men of the deepest policy, who were devoid of principle. How few are the instances of persons who, by fidelity, worth, and stedfast adherence to their duty, have either lost their fortunes, or incurred general displeasure, in times when human affairs were proceeding in their ordinary train? But how numerous and frequent are the examples of those whose prospects have been blasted, whose circumstances have been ruined, and their names sunk into contempt, by vice and dishonesty?

The man of the world aims at higher things, and more rapid success, than the man of moderation and virtue. But, at the same time, he incurs greater risks and dangers. No calculation of probabilities can insure safety to him who is acting a deceitful part. Amidst the unforeseen vicissitudes of the world, he has to dread not only disappointment to his

plans, but the miseries also which detected fallacies may bring on his head. He walks on the edge of precipices, where a single false step may be fatal. He follows a wandering light, which, if it fail of guiding him by a short path to the palace of ambition, lands him in the pit, or the lake. Whereas he who follows the guidance of integrity, walks in the high road on which the light of the sun shines. He sees before him the habitation of peace to which his steps are directed; and if he be longer in arriving at it, he is sure of neither wandering far astray, nor of meeting on his road with any forms of unusual terror. —— Let it be always remembered, that the principle of integrity which directs a good man, is far from excluding prudence in the conduct of life. It implies no improvident or thoughtless simplicity. On the contrary, it is closely connected with true wisdom. A man of enlarged capacity, and extensive views, is always upright. Craft is merely the supplement of inferior abilities. It characterises a narrow comprehension, and a little mind. — As the path of integrity is on the whole the safest path of conduct; so,

In the *second* place, it is unquestionably the most honourable. Integrity is the foundation of all that is high in character among mankind. Other qualities may add to its splendour; but, if this essential requisite be wanting, all their lustre fades. Were I drawing the character of one who claimed the admiration of the world; and after I had ascribed to him eloquence, valour, and every endowment that is most shining and captivating, did I add, that he was a man of too much art to be trusted, I appeal to

every one, whether, by this single stroke, the whole character would not be sunk and degraded? An interested and crafty man may perhaps rise into influence and high station; he may be a rich and a powerful, but will never be a great man. He may be feared, and externally honoured and courted; but in the secret thoughts of men he finds no respect. We all feel, that magnanimous sentiments cannot dwell in the same breast with selfishness and deceit.

He who rests upon an internal principle of virtue and honour, will act with a dignity and a boldness, of which they are incapable who are wholly guided by interest. He is above those timid suspicions, and cautious restraints, which fetter and embarrass their conduct. That firmness which the consciousness of rectitude inspires, gives vigour and force to his exertions on every great occasion. It adds double weight to all the abilities of which he is possessed. It even supplies the place of those abilities in which he is defective. They who oppose him are obliged to honour him. They look up to him with a secret awe, as to one who moves above them in a superior sphere; regardless of their good or ill opinion, of their promises or their threatenings: like one of those celestial luminaries which holds its course through its orbit, without being affected by any commotions among the elements below. Such a man is trusted, and relied upon, as well as esteemed, because all know where to find him, and upon what system he acts. He attaches friends and followers to himself, without courting them; and though his progress towards fame should be slow, and interrupted at first by crooked arts, it is nevertheless certain and sure. The public may be misled for a while, in judging of

real merit; but it is seldom unjust at the last. As persons continue to come forward to view, and to act their part in trying circumstances, their characters are at length fully ascertained; and, almost always, rated as they deserve. How corrupt soever the world may be, they cannot withhold approbation from him whose conduct is marked by uniform integrity and honour. Enemies he will have, but the public favours him; the multitude of men wish him success; and destine him, in their thoughts, to every step of his preferment, before he arrives at it.

In the *third* place, the plan of conduct on which the man of integrity proceeds, is the most comfortable; that is, attended with the greatest satisfaction in a man's own mind. Amidst the various and perplexing events of life, it is of singular advantage to be kept free from doubt, as to the part most proper to be chosen. He who consults nothing but worldly interest, must, upon every turn of fortune, undergo much painful suspense. He is obliged to listen with anxious ear to every whisper of report; and, upon every new aspect which the face of affairs assumes, must study how to place himself in a new posture of defence. But the man of principle is a stranger to these inward troubles. His time is not lost, nor his temper fretted, by long and anxious consultations. One light always shines upon him from above. One path, the path of integrity, always opens clear and distinct to his view.—But this is not his only advantage, to be freed from embarrassments, by having placed himself under the charge of one constant guide. He is also rewarded with the sense of having chosen his guide well and wisely. He is

delivered from all inward upbraidings; from all misgivings of mind, from all alarms founded on the dread of discovery and disgrace. A good conscience enables him to look back on the part which he has acted, with satisfaction; and to look forward to the issue which it may bring, without concern. It is in the case of one issue only, that the man who acts from worldly interest can enjoy satisfaction; that is, when his designs have succeeded according to his wish. But it is the felicity of the man who acts under the direction of integrity, that, in every issue, he has something to comfort him. Though success has failed him, the consolation remains of having done his duty, and studied to approve himself to God.

This reference of all his actions to Divine approbation, furnishes another source of satisfaction and peace. He looks up, with pleasing hope, to a protector in the heavens, who *loveth righteousness, and whose countenance beholdeth the upright.* The man of worldly wisdom is conscious of having no title to the favour of that high administration which rules the universe. By quitting the path of righteousness, he has left that straight road, in which God had appointed him to walk. He has taken the direction of his way to himself, and chosen to be his own guide and master. To his own abilities, therefore, such as they are, he must trust; and is become wholly responsible for the issue of his conduct. But the man of virtue hath *committed his way to the Lord.* He follows the Divine signal. He co-operates with the Divine purpose. The power which sways the universe, is engaged on his side. By natural consequence, he has ground to expect that any seeming disappointments which he may now incur, shall be over-ruled

at the end to some salutary effect. Hence that *peace of God keeping the heart*, to which worldly men are strangers. Hence a degree of firmness and resolution in conduct, which it is impossible for them to possess. Especially when we add,

In the *fourth* and last place, that he who thus pursues a course of integrity, has always in his view the prospect of immortal rewards. That surely is the wisest direction of conduct, which is most amply recompensed at last. But what recompence can worldly wisdom bestow, comparable to what is promised by the Gospel to them who, *by patient continuance in well-doing, look for glory, honour, and immortality.*—The recompence indeed is distant, but the hope of it is present; and hope is one of the most powerful principles of human action. Let a man be firm in the belief that he is acting under the immediate protection of Heaven, and that through all eternity he shall be rewarded for what he now performs; and, as far as this belief is prevalent, his conduct will be steady and determined. Wherever religion directs him to hold his course, he will advance with intrepidity. He will submit to restraints without reluctance. He will meet dangers without fear. To every motive which reason suggests in favour of virtue, the hope of life eternal adds supernatural strength.—Accordingly, in the behaviour of many holy men, under the most trying circumstances of distress, we behold this effect eminently exemplified. It appears, with much lustre, in the spirited and magnanimous sentiments of the Apostle Paul, when he had the prospect of death before him. *Behold, I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall*

befal me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy. * —— *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.* †

Thus I have endeavoured to shew in what manner the *integrity of the upright guides them;* and what the advantages are, of placing ourselves under its guidance. If it be the line of safety, or the line of honour, which we choose to pursue; if we consult our present comfort, or look forward to future rewards; in all these respects, the course which integrity points out is by far the most eligible.

It is a great recommendation of the guidance offered to us by integrity, that it is easily understood by all men. Plans of worldly policy are deep and intricate; and experience shows how often the ablest persons are mistaken in the measures which they adopt for carrying them on. But when men's intentions are fair and upright, it will be found, that a moderate share of understanding and attention is all that is requisite, for conducting themselves with safety and propriety. Providence never intended, that the art of living happily in this world should depend on that deep penetration, that acute sagacity, and those refinements of thought, which few possess. It has dealt more graciously with us; and made happiness to depend on uprightness of intention, much more

* Acts, xx. 22, 23, 24. † 2 Timothy, iv. 6, 7, 8.

than on extent of capacity. For the most part, the first sentiment which strikes a good man, concerning what he ought or ought not to do, is the soundest, and suggests the best and wisest counsel. When he hesitates, and begins to deliberate how far his duty, or his honour, can be reconciled to what seems his interest, he is on the point of deviating into a dangerous path.——At the same time, it is of great consequence, that he who seeks to surrender his conduct to the direction of integrity, should be well apprized of what true integrity requires. Let him guard against burdening conscience unnecessarily; lest a superstitious regard to trifles lead him to relax in matters of higher obligation. Let him avoid minute scrupulosity, on the one hand. Let him keep at a distance from loose casuistry, on the other. But when he is satisfied that his conscience has been well informed, let him, without wavering, adhere to its dictates in the whole of his conduct. This will prove the truest wisdom both for this world and the next. For *he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely. The path of the just is as the shining light:* And it shall *shine more and more unto the perfect day.*

SERMON LXVI.

On Submission to the Divine Will.

Job, ii. 10.

—Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?

FEW subjects of religious exhortation are of more general concern, than those which respect the distresses incident to human life. For no society, no family, no person, can expect to be long exempted from them; and when we speak of the prosperous, we can only mean those who are more rarely subject to them than others. Now, under those distresses, religion performs two offices: it teaches us how we ought to bear them; and it assists us in thus bearing them. Materials for both are found in the words of the text, which contain a sentiment so natural and just, as to carry conviction to every reasonable mind. They were the words of Job, at a time when, to his other calamities, this domestic affliction was added, that one who ought to have assuaged and soothed his sorrows, provoked his indignation by an impious speech. *Thou speakest,* Job replies, *as one of the foolish women speaketh: What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* Three instructions naturally arise from the text: First, That this life is a mixed state of good and evil: Secondly, That both the goods and the evils in it proceed from God: And, thirdly, That there

are just reasons for our receiving with patience the evils of life, from the same hand which bestows its goods.

I. This life is a mixed state of good and evil. This is a matter of fact, which will be denied by none, and on which it is not necessary to bestow much illustration. It is evident to the slightest inspection, that nothing here is unallayed and pure. Every man's state is chequered with alternate griefs and joys, disappointment and success. No condition is altogether stable. No life preserves always the same tenor. The vicissitudes of the world sometimes bring forward the afflicted into more comfortable circumstances; and often trouble the joy of the prosperous. This is the train in which human affairs have ever been found to proceed; and in which we may expect them always to go on.

But though this be universally admitted in speculation, and often confessed in discourse, the misfortune is, that few think of applying it to their own ease. The bulk of mankind discover as much confidence in prosperity, and as much impatience under the least reverse, as if Providence had first given them assurance that their prosperity was never to change, and afterwards had cheated their hopes. Whereas, what reason ought to teach us, is to adjust our mind to the mixed state in which we find ourselves placed; never to presume, — never to despair; to be thankful for the goods which at present we enjoy, and to expect the evils that may succeed. — Thou hast been admitted to partake of the feast of life. Its good things are distributed, in various portions, among the guests. Thou hast had thine allotted

share. Complain not when thy portion is removed: It is not permitted to any one, to remain always at the banquet.

II. We are taught by the text, that both the goods and the evils which compose this mixed state, come from the hand of God. A little reflection may convince us, that, in God's world, neither good nor evil can happen by chance. If there were any one moment, in which God quitted the reins of the universe, and suffered any power to interfere with his administration, it is evident, that, from that moment, the measures of his government must become disjointed and incomplete. He who governs all things, must govern continually; and govern the least things as well as the greatest. *He never slumbers, nor sleeps.* There are no void spaces, no broken plans, in his administration; no blessings that drop upon us without his intention; nor any crosses that visit us, unsent by him. *I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things.* *

How it has come to pass, that this life should contain such a mixture of goods and evils, and that the mixture too should be of God's appointment, gives rise to a difficult enquiry. For how can any thing but what is good proceed from the God of love? Can darkness issue from the source of light? or can it be any satisfaction to the *Father of mercies* to behold the sorrows of creatures whom he has made? —Here there was room for much perplexity, till revela-

* Isaiah, xlv. 6, 7.

tion informed us, that the mixture of evils in man's estate is owing to man himself. Had he continued as God originally made him, he would have received nothing but good from his Creator. His apostacy and corruption opened the gates of the tabernacle of darkness. Misery issued forth, and has ever since pursued him. In the present condition of his nature, that misery is partly punishment, partly trial. He is become incapable of bearing uninterrupted prosperity; and by the mixture of evils in his lot, merciful designs are carried on for his improvement and restoration.

What the text leads us at present to consider is, the effect that will follow from imitating the example of Job, and referring to the hand of the Almighty, the evils which we suffer, as well as the goods which we enjoy. Such a reference of the distressful events of our life to the appointment of Heaven, not only is a duty which piety requires, but tends also to mitigate distress, and to suggest consolation. For to dwell, as is too commonly done upon the instruments and subordinate means of our trouble, is frequently the cause of much grief, and much sin. When we view our sufferings as proceeding merely from our fellow-creatures, the part which they have acted in bringing them upon us, is often more grating than the suffering itself. The unreasonableness, perhaps, of an enemy, the treachery of a friend, the ingratitude or insolence of one whom we had much obliged, add weight to a load laid upon us by means so provoking. The thoughts of their malignity, or of our own neglect in guarding against it, serve to poison the sore. Whereas, if, instead of looking to men, we behold the cross as coming from God, these

aggravating circumstances would affect us less; we would feel no more than a proper burden; we would submit to it more patiently; and many resources would open to us, as shall in a little be shewn, from thinking of the hand that lays it on. Had Job, when despoiled of all his substance, thought of nothing but the Chaldeans and Sabeans who robbed him, with what violent passions would he have been transported, and with what eager desires of revenge tormented? Whereas, considering them as rods and instruments only in the divine hand, and receiving the correction as from the Almighty himself, the tumult of his mind subsided; and with respectful composure he could say, *The Lord gave; and the Lord hath taken away: Blessed be the name of the Lord!* This leads me,

III. To consider the last, and most important instruction, arising from the text; namely, that there are many reasons why we, who receive good from the hand of God, should receive with patience the evils which he is pleased to inflict. This is strongly conveyed by that interrogatory form of speech, in which the sentiment of Job is expressed: *What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* In order to unfold all that is contained in this appeal made to every man's conscience, let us consider,

In the *first* place, that the good things which God has bestowed, afford sufficient evidence for our believing, that the evils which he sends, are not causelessly or wantonly inflicted. Did we live in a world which bore the marks of a malicious or cruel gover-

nor, there might be reason for distrusting every step of his conduct. But in the world which we inhabit, we behold, on the contrary, plain marks of predominant goodness. We behold the structure of the universe, the order of nature, the general course of Providence, obviously arranged with a benevolent regard to the welfare of men. All the art and contrivance of which the Divine works are full, point to this end; and the more they are explored, create the firmer belief, that the goodness of the Deity gave rise to the system of creation. What is the conclusion to be thence drawn, but that, in such parts of the Divine administration as appears to us harsh and severe, the same goodness continues to preside, though exercised in a hidden and mysterious manner.

Let me desire you to consider, whether, if some powerful friend had placed you in an opulent and comfortable station, and in the general conduct of your affairs, had discovered the most disinterested kindness, you would not ascribe any occasional discouragements you received to some unknown reason or cause, rather than to his unfaithfulness or cruelty? Ought not the experience which we have had, and the discovery which all nature affords of the divine goodness, to lead us to put a like construction on the evils which we suffer from a hand that hath so frequently loaded us with good? —— Have we forgotten, in the midst of our complaints, who brought us into the light of day; who watched over our helpless infancy; who reared our growing childhood; and, through ten thousand surrounding dangers, has been our protector and guardian until this day? How often has he rescued us from sickness and death, and made our hearts glad with unexpected comforts?

Now, that some cloud is thrown over our prosperity, or some blessing withdrawn, in which for a time we had rejoiced, can we imagine that there is no good cause for this change of his proceeding? Shall we suspect that his nature is entirely altered? *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* No; let us say with the Psalmist, *This is my infirmity; but I will remember the works of the Lord: I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.** ——One signal work of the Most High, at least, let us remember, and rejoice in the remembrance of it; even that final remedy which he has provided for all the evils occasioned by sin, in the redemption of the world accomplished by Jesus Christ. *He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,* will he, in any case, wantonly afflict the children of men with superfluous and unnecessary sorrows? Is not this a proof so satisfactory, so express and demonstrative, of the gracious purposes of God, as should dispose us to take in good part every thing which proceeds from him? Consider,

In the *second* place, that the good things we receive from God are undeserved, the evils we suffer are justly merited. Every reasonable person must feel the weight of this consideration, for producing patience and submission. For, though to suffer at any rate be grievous, yet to suffer unjustly is doubly galling. Whereas, when one receives a mixed portion, whereof the goods are above his deserts, and the evils below his deserts, to complain in such a case, is unreasonable; there is more ground for being

* Psalm lxxvii. 9, 10.

thankful. All, it is true, have not deserved evil equally. Yet all of us deserve it more or less; and to merit good at the hand of the Lord, is what none of us can pretend. At the best, we are but *unprofitable servants.* Even this is more than we are entitled to claim. For if God were to *enter into judgment* with us, who could stand before him? who could justify himself in his sight? When the most inoffensive compare their conduct with God's holy law; when they reflect upon the duties they have omitted, and the actual guilt they have contracted, they will find more reason to accuse themselves, than to complain of the divine chastisement. Whatever innocence any of us may plead, nay, whatever merit we may claim, with respect to men and the world, we suffer no more than what we deserve from the Governor of the world; and of his displeasure, we know that the wrath of man is no other than the instrument.

Not only all of us have done evil, but what ought to be particularly attended to, God has a just title to punish us for it. Although a man know that he deserves punishment, yet he will not allow every one to inflict it. A child will submit to his parents, a servant to his master, a subject to the magistrate, when he would not bear correction from another hand. But no parent can have so complete a right to authority over his children, no master over his servants, no magistrate over his subjects, as the Almighty hath over us. When we were born, we brought nothing with us into God's world. During our continuance in it, we have lived on the good things which God has pleased to lend us; and of which, God and our own conscience know that we have made but a sorry improvement. When he

thinks proper to take any of them away, no wrong is done us: for they were not ours. To have enjoyed them so long, was a favour. To enjoy them always was what we neither deserved, nor had any title to expect.

In the *third* place, the good things which at different times we have received and enjoyed, are much greater than the evils which we suffer. Of this fact, I am sensible it will be difficult to persuade the afflicted. But would they weigh, in a fair balance, the whole of their circumstances, they would find it true. Whatever persons feel at the present, makes so strong an impression upon them, as very common to obliterate the memory of all the past. When one is impressed with some painful disease in his body, or wrung with some sore distress of mind, every former comfort, at that moment, goes for nothing. Life is beheld in all its gloom. A dark cloud seems to hang over it; and it is reviled, as no other than a scene of wretchedness and sorrow. But this is to be unjust to human life, as well as ungrateful to its author. —— Let me only desire you to think how many days, how many months, how many years, you have passed in health, and ease, and comfort; how many pleasurable feelings you have had; how many friends you have enjoyed; how many blessings, in short, of different kinds you have tasted; and you will be forced to acknowledge, that more materials of thanksgiving present themselves, than of lamentation and complaint. —— These blessings, you will say, are past. But though past, ought they to be gone from your remembrance? Do they merit no place, in the comparative estimate of the goods and evils of your

state? Did you, could you expect, that in this mutable world, any temporal joy was to last for ever? Has gratitude no influence to form your minds to a calm acquiescence in your benefactor's appointments? What can be more reasonable than to say, "Having "in former times received so many good things from "the hand of God, shall I not now, without mur-"muring, receive the few evils which it pleases him "to send?"

In the *fourth* place, not only the goods of life are, upon the whole, greater than its evils; but the evils which we suffer are seldom, or never, without some mixture of good. As there is no condition on earth of pure unmixed felicity, so there is none so miserable, as to be destitute of every comfort. Entire, and complete misery, if ever it take place, is of our own procuring, not of God's sending. None but the most gross and atrocious sinners can be in such a situation, as to discover no ray of relief or hope. In the ordinary distresses of life, it is generally our own folly and infirmity, which, upon the loss of some one blessing that we had highly prized, deprives us of satisfaction in all other things. Many of our calamities are purely imaginary, and self-created; arising from rivalship or competition with others, and from false opinions of the importance of objects, to which custom and fashion have annexed an ideal value. Were these mistaken opinions once corrected by reason, the evil would disappear, and contentment would resume its place. With respect to those calamities which are inflicted by God, his Providence has made this wise and merciful constitution, that, after the first shock, the burden by degrees is light-

ened. Time brings a gentle and powerful opiate to all misfortunes. What is very violent cannot last long; and what lasts long, we become accustomed to bear. Every situation that is permanent, at length is felt to be tolerable. The mind accommodates itself to it; and by degrees regains its usual tranquillity. Hence the greatest part of the evils of life are more terrible in the previous apprehension, than in the actual feeling; and it seldom happens but, in one corner or other, something is found on which the mind can lay hold for its relief.

How many, for instance, do we behold around us, straitened in their worldly circumstances, and yet finding the means to live cheerfully, with poverty and peace in the same habitation? If we are deprived of friends whom we tenderly loved, are there not still some remaining, from whom we may expect much comfort? If our bodies are afflicted with sore disease, have we not reason to be thankful that our mind continues vigorous and entire; that we are in a situation to look around us for whatever can afford us ease; and that, after the decay of this frail and mouldering tabernacle, we can look forward to a *house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?* — In the midst of all distresses, there remains to every sincere Christian, that mixture of pure and genuine consolation, which springs from the promises and hopes of the Gospel. Consider, I beseech you, what a singularly happy distinction this makes in your situation, beyond the state of those who, under the various troubles of life, are left *without hope, and without God in the world;* without any thing to look to, but a train of unknown causes and accidents, in which they see no light nor comfort. — Thank the

Father of mercies, that into all the evils he sends he infuses this joyful hope, that *the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed* in the end, to the virtuous and good.

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In the *fifth* and last place, as the evils which we suffer are thus alleviated by a mixture of good; so we have reason to believe, that the evils themselves are, in many respects, good. When borne with patience and dignity, they improve and ennoble our character. They bring into exercise several of the manly and heroic virtues; and, by the constancy and fidelity with which we support our trials on earth, prepare us for the highest rewards in Heaven. —It has always been found, that the present constitution of human nature cannot bear uninterrupted prosperity, without being corrupted by it. The poisonous weeds which spring up in that too luxuriant soil, require the hand of adversity to extirpate them. It is the experience of sorrow and distress that subdues the arrogance of pride, tames the violence of passion, softens the hardness of the selfish heart, and humanizes the temper to feel for the woes of others. Many have had reason to say, that *it was good for them to be afflicted.** *When men take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ,* they are apt to *say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? But when they are holden in cords of affliction, then he sheweth them their work and their transgressions that they*

* Psalm cxix. 71.

*have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.** Is his case to be deplored as highly calamitous, who, by forfeiting some transient enjoyments of the world, purchases lasting improvement in piety and virtue, and exchanges a few of the good things of this life for the better things of another?

INFLUENCED by such considerations as these, let us look up with reverence to the great Disposer of events; and under any distress with which he is pleased to visit us, let us utter no other voice but this; *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* — Men are too often ingenious in making themselves miserable, by aggravating to their own fancy, beyond bounds, all the evils which they endure. They compare themselves with none but those whom they imagine to be more happy; and complain that upon them alone has fallen the whole load of human sorrows. Would they look with a more impartial eye on the world, they would see themselves surrounded with sufferers; and find that they are only drinking out of that mixed cup which Providence has prepared for all. "I will restore "your daughter again to life," said the Eastern sage to a prince who grieved immoderately for the loss of a beloved child, "provided you are able to engrave "on her tomb the names of three persons who have "never mourned." The prince made enquiry after such persons; but found the enquiry vain, and was silent. — To every reasonable person, who retains the belief of religious principles, many alleviating

* Job, xxi. 12. — xxxvi. 8.

circumstances, and many arguments for patience, will occur, under every distress. If we rest on this firm persuasion, that there is a wise and just Providence which disposes of all events, we shall have reason to conclude, that nothing happens to us here without some good design: Trusting that a happy termination shall at last arrive to the disorders of our present state, we shall be enabled, amidst all the varieties of fortune, to preserve that equanimity which befits Christians, and under every trial to say, *It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his sight.*

SERMON LXVII.

On Friendship.

Proverbs, xxvii. 10.

Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not. —

WHATEVER relates to the behaviour of men in their social character is of great importance in religion. The duties which spring from that character, form many branches of the great law of charity, which is the favourite precept of Christianity. They, therefore, who would separate such duties from a religious spirit, or who at most treat them as only the inferior parts of it, do a real injury to religion. They are mistaken friends of piety, who, under the notion of exalting it, place it in a sort of insulated corner, disjoined from the ordinary affairs of the world, and the connections of men with one another. On the contrary, true piety influences them all. It acts as a vivifying spirit, which animates and enlivens, which rectifies and conducts them. It is no less friendly to men than zealous for the honour of God; and by the generous affections which it nourishes, and the beneficent influence which it exerts on the whole of conduct, is fully vindicated from every reproach which the infidel would throw upon it. — In this view I am now to discourse on the nature and duties of virtuous friendship, as closely connected with the true spirit

of religion. It is a subject which the inspired philosopher, who is the author of this book of Proverbs, has thought worthy of his repeated notice; and in many passages has bestowed the highest eulogiums on friendship among good men. *As ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel. As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Make sure of thy friend; for faithful are the wounds of a friend. A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is born for adversity. There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.* — *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend,* it is said in the text, *forsake not.*

I MUST begin the subject, by observing, that there are among mankind friendships of different kinds, or at least, connections which assume that name. When they are no more than confederacies of bad men, they ought to be called conspiracies rather than friendships. Some bond of common interest, some league against the innocent and unsuspecting, may have united them for a time. But they are held together only by a rope of sand. At bottom they are all rivals, and hostile to one another. Their friendship can subsist no longer than interest cements them. Every one looks with a jealous eye on his supposed friend; and watches the first favourable opportunity to desert, or to betray.

Friendships too there are of a different kind, and of a more respectable nature, formed by the connection of political parties. It is not, perhaps, on selfish or crooked designs that such friendships are originally founded. Men have been associated

together, by some public interest, or general cause, or for defence against some real or imagined danger; and connections thus formed, often draw men into close union, and inspire for a season no small degree of cordial attachment. When upon just and honourable principles this union is founded, it has proved, on various occasions, favourable to the cause of liberty and good order among mankind. At the same time, nothing is more ready to be abused than the name of public spirit, and a public cause. It is a name under which private interest is often sheltered, and selfish designs are carried on. The unwary are allured by a specious appearance; and the heat of faction usurps the place of the generous warmth of friendship.

It is not of such friendships, whether of the laudable or the suspicious kind, that I am now to discourse; but of private friendships, which grow neither out of interested designs nor party zeal; but which flow from that similarity of dispositions, that corresponding harmony of minds, which endears some person to our heart, and makes us take as much part in his circumstances, fortunes, and fate, as if they were our own. *The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.** Such friendships certainly are not unreal; and, for the honour of human nature, it is to be hoped, are not altogether unfrequent, among mankind. —— Happy it is, when they take root in our early years; and are engrafted on the ingenuous sensibility of youth. Friendships, then contracted,

* 1 Samuel, xviii. 1.

retain to the last a tenderness and warmth, seldom possessed by friendships that are formed in the riper periods of life. The remembrance of ancient and youthful connections melts every human heart; and the dissolution of them is, perhaps, the most painful feeling to which we are exposed here below. —— But at whatever period of life friendships are formed, as long as they continue sincere and affectionate, they form, undoubtedly, one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy. By the pleasing communications of all our sentiments which they prompt, they are justly said to double our pleasures and to divide our sorrows. They give a brighter sunshine to the gay incidents of life; and they enlighten the gloom of its darker hours. *A faithful friend*, it is justly and beautifully said by one of the Apocryphal writers, *is the medicine of life.** A variety of occasions happen, when to pour forth the heart to one whom we love and trust, is the chief comfort, perhaps the only relief, we can enjoy. Miserable is he who, shut up within the narrow inclosure of selfish interest, has no person to whom he can at all times, with full confidence, expand his soul.

Since cordial friendship is so great a blessing to human life, let us proceed to consider what duties it requires, and by what methods it may be cultivated to most advantage. The fundamental qualities of true friendship are, constancy and fidelity. Without these material ingredients it is of no value. An inconstant man is not capable of friendship. He may perhaps have affections which occasionally glow in his heart; which excite fondness for amiable qualities; or connect him with seeming attachment

* Ecclesiasticus, vi. 16.

to one whom he esteems, or to whom he has been obliged. But after these feelings have lasted for a little, either fancied interest alienates him, or some new object attracts him; and he is no longer the same person to those whom he once loved. A man of this inconstant mind cannot be said to have any mind at all. For where there is no fixedness of moral principle, occasional feelings are of no value; mind is of no effect; and with such persons it is never desirable to have any connection. Where constancy is wanting, there can be no fidelity, which is the other basis of friendship. For all friendship supposes entire confidence and trust; supposes the seal of secrecy to be inviolable; supposes promises and engagements to be sacred; and no advantage of our own to be pursued, at the expense of our friend's honour. An inconstant man is despicable. A faithless man is base.

But supposing neither constancy nor fidelity to be altogether wanting, still however friendship is in hazard of suffering from the follies, and unreasonable humours, to which all of us are liable. It is to be regarded as a tender plant in an unfavourable soil, which, in order to its flourishing, requires to be reared and nursed with care. The following directions may be of use for promoting its cultivation, and preserving it from whatever might be apt to blast and wither it.

In the *first* place, let me advise you not to expect perfection in any with whom you contract friendship. It holds in general with respect to all worldly pursuits, that the more moderate our expectations

are, they are likely to be the more successful. If in any situation of life, we hope to possess complete happiness, we may depend on receiving modifications. If, in any person, we trust to find nothing but perfection, we may be assured that, on longer acquaintance, we shall meet with disappointments. In the case of friendship, this admonition is the more necessary to be given, as a certain warmth and enthusiasm belong to it, which are apt to carry us beyond the bounds o nature. In young minds, especially, a disposition of this kind is often found to take place. They form to themselves romantic ideas, gathered perhaps from fictitious histories of the high and heroic qualities which belong to human nature. All those qualities they ascribe, without reserve or limitation, to the person with whom they wish to enter into intimate friendship; and on the least failure appearing, alienation instantly follows. Hence many a friendship, hastily perhaps contracted, is as hastily dissolved, and disgust succeeds to violent attachment. — Remember, my friends, that a faultless character on earth is a mere chimera. Many failings you experience in yourselves. Be not surprised when you discover the like in others, of whom you had formed the highest opinion. The best and most estimable persons are they, in whom the fewest material defects are found; and whose great and solid qualities counterbalance the common infirmities of men. It is to these qualities you are to look in forming friendships; to good sense and prudence, which constitute the basis of every respectable character; to virtue, to good temper, to steadiness of affection; and according to the union of those dispositions, esteem yourselves happy in the friend whom you choose.

In the *second* place, I must admonish you not to be hurt by differences of opinion arising in intercourse with your friends. It is impossible for these not to occur. Perhaps no two persons were ever cast so exactly in the same mould, as to think always in the same manner on every subject. It was wisely contrived by Providence, that diversity of sentiment should take place among men, on purpose to exercise our faculties, and to give variety to human life. Perpetual uniformity of thought would become monotonous and insipid. — When it is with regard to trifles that diversity or contrariety of opinion shows itself, it is childish in the last degree, if this become the ground of estranged affection. When from such a cause there arises any breach of friendship, human weakness is then discovered in a mortifying light. In matters of serious moment, the sentiments of the best and worthiest may vary from those of their friends, according as their lines of life diverge, or as their temper and habits of thought present objects under different points of view. But, among candid and liberal minds, unity of affection will still be preserved. No man has any title to erect his own opinions into an universal and infallible standard, and the more enlarged that any man's mind is, the more readily he will overlook differences in sentiments, as long as he is persuaded that the mind of his friend is upright, and that he follows the dictates of conscience and integrity.

In the *third* place, It is material to the preservation of friendship, that openness of temper and manners, on both hands, be cultivated. Nothing more certainly dissolves friendship, than the jealousy

which arises from darkness and concealment. If your situation oblige you to take a different side from your friend, do it openly. Avow your conduct; avow your motives; as far as honour allows, disclose yourselves frankly; seek no cover from unnecessary and mysterious secrecy. Mutual confidence is the soul of friendship. As soon as that is destroyed, or even impaired, it is only a show of friendship that remains. What was once cordial intimacy, degenerates first into formal civility. Constraint on both sides next succeeds; and disgust or hatred soon follow. — The maxim that has been laid down by certain crooked politicians, to behave to a friend with the same guarded caution as we would do to an enemy, because it is possible that he may one day become such, discovers a mind which never was made for the enjoyments of friendship. It is a maxim which, not unreasonably I admit, may find place in those political and party friendships, of which I before spoke, where personal advancement is always in view. But it is altogether inconsistent with the spirit of those friendships, which are formed, and understood to be nourished, by the heart.

The *fourth* advice which I give is, To cultivate, in all intercourse among friends, gentle and obliging manners. It is a common error to suppose, that familiar intimacy supersedes attention to the lesser duties of behaviour; and that, under the notion of freedom, it may excuse a careless, or even a rough demeanor. On the contrary, an intimate connection can only be kept up by a constant wish to be pleasing and agreeable. The nearer and closer that men are brought together, the more frequent that

the points of contact between them become, there is the greater necessity for the surface being smooth, and every thing being removed that can grate or offend. — Let no harshness, no appearance of neglect, no supercilious affectation of superiority, occur in the intercourse of friends. A tart reply, a proneness to rebuke, a captious and contradictious spirit, are often known to embitter domestic life, and to set friends at variance. In those smaller articles of behaviour, where men are too apt to be careless, and to indulge their humour without restraint, the real character is often understood to break forth and show itself. It is by no means enough, that in all matters of serious interest, we think ourselves ready to prove the sincerity of our friendship. These occur more rarely. The ordinary tenor of life is composed of small duties and offices, which men have occasion daily to perform; and it is only by rendering daily behaviour agreeable, that we can long preserve the comforts of friendship.

In the *fifth* place, Let me caution you not to listen rashly to evil reports against your friends. When upon proper grounds you have formed a connection, be slow of believing any thing against the friend whom you have chosen. Remember, that there is among mankind a spirit of malignity, which too often takes pleasure in disturbing the society of those who appear to enjoy one another. The Scripture hath warned us, that there is *a whisperer who separateth chief friends; there is a false witness who soweth discord among brethren.* Give not therefore a ready ear to the officious insinuations of those who, under the

guise of friendly concern, come to admonish you, that you ought to stand on your guard against those whom they see you disposed to trust. Consider, whether, under this fair appearance, there may not lurk some secret envy and rivalry, or some concealed interest. Chase not every flying report. Suffer not the poison of jealousy easily to taint your mind, and break your peace. A wide difference there is between that weak credulity which allows itself to be imposed upon blindly, and that dark and suspicious spirit which is always inclined to the evil side. It forms part of the character of a wise and good man, that he is not prone to *take up a reproach against his neighbour*.

In the *sixth* and last place, Let me exhort you not to desert your friend in danger or distress. Too many there are in the world, whose attachment to those they call their friends is confined to the day of their prosperity. As long as that continues, they are, or appear to be affectionate and cordial. But as soon as their friend is under a cloud, they begin to withdraw, and to separate their interest from his. In friendship of this sort, the heart, assuredly, has never had much concern. For the great test of true friendship is constancy in the hour of danger, adherence in the season of distress. — When your friend is calumniated, then is the time openly and boldly to espouse his cause. When his situation is changed, or his fortunes are falling, then is the time of affording prompt and zealous aid. When sickness or infirmity occasion him to be neglected by others, that is the opportunity which every real friend will seize, of redoubling all the affectionate attentions which love

suggests. These are the important duties, the sacred claims of friendship, which religion and virtue enforce on every worthy mind. — To show yourselves warm, after this manner, in the cause of your friend, commands esteem, even from those who have personal interest in opposing him. This honourable zeal of friendship has, in every age, attracted the veneration of mankind. It has consecrated to the latest posterity the names of those who have given up their fortunes, and have even exposed their lives, in behalf of the friends whom they loved; while ignominy and disgrace have ever been the portion of them who deserted their friends in the evil day, *Thine own friend forsake not.*

Before concluding, it must not be forgotten, that the injunction of the Wise Man in the text is accompanied with this remarkable expression; not only *thine own friend*, but also *thy father's friend, forsake not.* These words bring back to our remembrance the days of former years; and suggest a sentiment which cannot but touch every feeling heart. Thine own friend may be dear; thy father's friend ought to be sacred. As long as life remains in any human breast, the memory of those ancient ties should remain, which connected us once with our father, and our father's house. Thy father has, perhaps, long ago gone down to the dust. But when you recal the innocent days of childhood and youth; when you think of those family-transactions which once gladdened your hearts; your father's friend, in the midst of these, will rise to your remembrance. There was a time when you accosted him with respect, or looked up to him with fondness, and was made happy

by his kindly notice. Does such a one now survive, and shall he not receive from you some portion of filial reverence and honour? To disregard and neglect him, is to spurn your father's memory; is to insult the ashes of him who now sleeps in the grave; is to transmit yourselves to those who shall succeed you, as unfeeling and base. *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.*

I HAVE pointed out some of the chief duties which belong to virtuous friendship; and some of the principal means by which this sacred bond should be preserved unbroken; this holy flame should be kept alive in the human breast. The spirit, and sentiments, which I have studied to inspire, are such as virtue breathes, and such as true piety should increase. It is thus we fulfil that great law of love which our Divine Master taught. It is thus we prepare ourselves for those happy regions, where *charity never faileth;* where, in the presence of the God of Love, eternal and invariable friendships unite together all the blessed; friendships, which, by no human infirmity disturbed, by death never separated, shall constitute, throughout endless ages, a great and distinguished portion of the celestial felicity.

SERMON LXVIII.

On the Conduct to be held with regard to Future Events.

Proverbs, xxvii. 1.

Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

FROM these words I purpose to discourse of the proper conduct which we ought to hold, with regard to futurity, amidst the present uncertainties of life. Time and life are always going on, and to each of us are preparing changes in our state. What these may be, whether for the better or for the worse, we cannot tell; as it hath pleased the wisdom of Providence to cover futurity with a veil which no mortal can lift up. In the mean time, none of us can avoid forming designs and laying plans for the time to come. The present moment is never sufficient to give full employment to the active mind of man, without some excursions into futurity; and in these excursions, the present is often wholly spent. It is therefore of the highest consequence, that a proper direction be given to the mind, in its employments of thought relating to futurity. Otherwise, in the prospects which we take of that unknown region, false hopes, or ill-grounded fears, shall flatter or torment us in vain. *We know not*, as the Wise

Man tells us, *what a day may bring forth.* It may, very probably, produce something that we had not looked for; and therefore, instead of *boasting ourselves of to-morrow*, as the multitude are apt to do, it becomes us to be disciplined and prepared for whatever it may bring.

It is needless to spend much time in confirming the truth, which is the foundation of the admonition in the text; in proving, either that change and mutability belong to our present state, or that the changes of it cannot be foreseen by us. These are truths so obvious and confessed, that an attempt to confirm them is like proving that all men are to die. At the same time, obvious as they are, it were to be wished that the thoughts of men dwelt upon them more. For by a strange but prevailing deception, it would seem, from the general conduct of mankind, that almost every one thinks his own case an exception from the general law; and that he may build plans with as much confidence on his present situation, as if some assurance had been given him that it were never to change. Hence it has been often observed by serious persons, that there is no more general cause to which the vices of men can be ascribed, their forgetfulness of God and their neglect of duty, than to their presuming upon the continuance of life, of pleasure, and prosperity.

Look but a little way, my friends, into your own state; and you must unavoidably perceive that, from the beginning, it has been so contrived by Providence, that there should be no permanent stability to man's condition on earth. The seeds of alteration are every where sown. In your health, life, posses-

sions, connections, pleasures, there are causes of decay imperceptibly working; secretly undermining the foundations of what appears to you the most stable; continually tending to abolish the present form of things, and to bring forward new appearances, and new objects in their order: So that nothing is, or can be, stationary on earth. All changes, and passes. It is a stream which is ever flowing; a wheel which is ever turning round. When you behold the tree covered with blossoms in the spring, or loaded with fruit in the autumn, as well may you imagine, that those blossoms, or that fruit, are to remain in their place through the whole year, as believe that human affairs are to continue, for to-day and to-morrow, for this year and the next, proceeding in the same tenor. To render this reflection still more serious, think, I pray you, on what small and inconsiderable causes those changes depend, which affect the fortunes of men, throughout their whole lives. How soon is evil done! There needs no great bustle or stir, no long preparation of events, to overturn what seems most secure, and to blast what appears most flourishing. A gale of wind rises on the ocean; and the vessel which carried our friends, or our fortunes, is overwhelmed in the deep. A spark of a candle falls by night in some neglected corner; and the whole substance of families is consumed in flames before the morning. A casual blow, or a sudden fall, deranges some of our internal parts; and the rest of life is distress and misery. It is awful to think, at the mercy of how many seeming contingencies we perpetually lie, for what we call happiness in this world.

In the midst, however, of all these apparent con-

tingencies, plans and designs for the future are every day formed; pursuits are undertaken; and life proceeds in its usual train. Fit and proper it is, that life should thus proceed. For the uncertainty of to-morrow was never designed by Providence, to deter us from acting or planning to-day; but only to admonish us, that we ought to plan, and to act, soberly and wisely. — What that wise and sober conduct is which becomes us, what the rules and precautions are, which, in such a state as ours, respect futurity, I now proceed to show. They may be comprehended in the following directions. Boast not thyself of to-morrow; Despair not of to-morrow; Delay not till to-morrow what is proper to be done to-day; Prepare thyself for whatever to-morrow may bring forth; Build thy hopes of happiness on something more solid and lasting than what either to-day or to-morrow will produce.

I. In the words of the text, *Boast not thyself of to-morrow;* that is, never presume arrogantly on futurity; in the most fair and promising state of fortune, beware of pride and vanity; beware of resting wholly upon yourselves, and forgetting Him who directs the changes of this mutable state. If there be any virtues which the uncertain condition of the world inculcates on man, they are, assuredly, moderation and humility. Man was, for this end, placed in a world, where he knows so little of what is before him, that he might be impressed with a sense of his dependence on the Ruler of the world; that, he might feel the importance of acquiring favour and protection from Heaven, by a life of piety and virtue; and that, not knowing how soon

his own condition may be the same with that of the most wretched, he might be prompted to act towards all his brethren the humane and friendly part.—— The favours which Providence bestows upon him at present, he ought to receive with thankfulness, and may enjoy with cheerfulness. Though commanded not to *boast himself of to-morrow*, the meaning of the precept is not, that he must be sad to-day. Rejoice he may in the day of prosperity; but certainly, *Rejoice with trembling*, is the inscription that should be written on all human pleasures.

As for them who, intoxicated with those pleasures, become giddy and insolent; who, flattered by the illusions of prosperity, make light of every serious admonition which the changes of the world give them, what can I say too strong to alarm them of their danger?—They have said to themselves, *My mountain stands strong, and shall never be moved. To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly. I shall never see adversity.*—Rash and wretched men! are you sensible how impious such words are? To the world, perhaps, you dare not utter them; but they speak the secret language of your hearts. Know, you are usurping upon Providence; you are setting Heaven at defiance; you are not only preparing sharper stings for yourselves, when the changes of life shall come, but you are accelerating those changes; you are fast bringing ruin upon your own heads. For God will not suffer pride in man; and the experience of all ages hath shown, how careful he is to check it. In a thousand memorable instances, the course of his government has been visibly pointed against it. *He showeth strength with his arm, and scattereth the proud in the imaginations of their hearts. The day of*

the Lord is upon every one that is proud and lifted up; to humble the lofty looks of man, and to stain the pride of all glory. * Some of the ministers of Divine displeasure are commissioned to go forth; and to humble, without delay, the *boasters of to-morrow.*

II. As we are not to boast, so neither are we to despair, of to-morrow. The former admonition was directed to those whom prosperity had elated with vain hopes. This is designed for those whom a more adverse situation in life has filled with fears and alarms of what is to come. The reason of both admonitions is the same, *thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It may bring forth some unexpected misfortunes; and therefore thou shouldst be humble in prosperity. It may bring forth some unforeseen relief; and therefore thou shouldst hope under distress. — It is too common with mankind, to be totally engrossed and overcome by present events. Their present condition, whatever it is, they are apt to imagine will never change; and hence by prosperity they are lifted up, and by adversity are dejected and broken; prone, in the one case to forget God; in the other to repine against him. Whereas the doctrine, which the changes of the world perpetually inculcate, is, that no state of external things should appear so important, or should so affect and agitate our spirits, as to deprive us of a calm, an equal, and a steady mind. Man knoweth neither the good nor the evil which is before him. In your *patience, therefore, possess your souls:* trusting in the day of sorrow, that God hath not *forgotten to be gracious;*

* Luke i. 51. Isaiah ii. 11, 12. xxiii. 9.

and that, *though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh* to the upright *in the morning.*

Distress not yourselves, then, with anxious fears about to-morrow. Let me exhort you to dismiss all solicitude, which goes beyond the bounds of prudent precaution. Anxiety, when it seizes the heart, is a dangerous disease, productive both of much sin, and much misery. It acts as a corrosive of the mind. It eats out our present enjoyments, and substitutes, in their place, many an acute pain. — The Wise Man, in the text, has advised us *not to boast of to-morrow;* and our Saviour has instructed us to *take no thought for to-morrow.* * Both these directions, properly understood, are entirely consistent; and the great rule of conduct, respecting futurity, is compounded of them both; requiring us, neither arrogantly to presume on to-morrow, nor to be anxiously and fearfully solicitous about it. *The morrow,* says our Saviour, *shall take thought for the things of itself.* We shall be better able to judge of the course most proper for us to hold, when events have begun to come forward in their order. Their presence often suggests wiser counsels and more successful expedients, than it is possible for us to contrive at a distance. By excess of solicitude beforehand, we frequently introduce that confusion of mind, and that hurry and disorder of spirits, which bring us into the most unfavourable state for judging soundly.——Wherefore, never indulge either anxiety, or despair about futurity. Affright not yourselves with imaginary terrors. Anticipate not evils, which perhaps may never come. Make the best which you can of this day, in the fear of God, and in the practice of your duty; and, having done so, leave

* Matth. vi. 34.

to-morrow to itself. *Sufficient for the day*, when it comes, *will be the evil thereof.*

III. DELAY not till to-morrow any thing which is fit and proper to be done to-day. Remember, that thou art not the lord of to-morrow. Thou art so far from having any title to dispose of it, that thou art ignorant of the most material circumstances relating to it; not only of what it shall bring forth, but whether thou shalt live to see it.—Notwithstanding the incontrovertible evidence of this truth, procrastination has, throughout every age, been the ruin of mankind. Dwelling amidst endless projects of what they are hereafter to do, they cannot so properly be said to live, as to be always about to live; and the future has ever been the gulph in which the present is swallowed up and lost.—Hence arise many of those misfortunes which befal men in their worldly concerns. What might at present be arranged in their circumstances with advantage, being delayed to another opportunity, cannot be arranged at all. To-morrow being loaded with the concerns of to-day, in addition to its own, is clogged and embarrassed. Affairs, which have been postponed, multiply and crowd upon one another; till at last, they prove so intricate and perplexed, and the pressure of business becomes so great, that nothing is left, but to sink under the burden. Of him, therefore, who indulges this lingering and delaying spirit in worldly matters, it is easy to prognosticate that the ruin is not far off.

Evils of the same kind, arising from the same cause, overtake men, in their moral and spiritual interests. There are few, but who are sensible of some things in their character and behaviour, which

ought to be corrected, and which, at one time or other, they intend to correct; some headstrong passion, which they design to subdue; some bad habit, which they purpose to reform; some dangerous connection, which they are resolved to break off. But the convenient season for these reformations is not yet come. Certain obstacles are in the way, which they expect by-and-by to surmount; and therefore they go on in peace for the present, in their usual courses, trusting, at a future day, to begin their designed improvement. In the mean time the angel of death descends; and, in the midst of their distant plans, executes his commission, and carries them away.—Guard against delusions of this kind, which have been fatal to so many.—Thou art now in tranquillity, in health, in possession of a calm mind. Improve these advantages, for performing all that becomes thee, as a man, and as a Christian; for, who can tell how long thou shalt be permitted to enjoy them? New alterations of fortune may be just coming forward; new troubles in public, or in private life, about to arise; new exigencies ready to throw thee into some condition, which shall leave thee neither leisure nor opportunity to execute any of the good purposes thou hast at present in thy mind. Wherefore, trifle no longer with what is so serious, and what may be so critical; but *to-day, while it is called to-day*, listen to the voice of God, and do his works. *Do now*, as the Wise Man advises, *with thy might whatsoever thy hand findeth to do; for there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest**.——Instead of delaying till to-morrow what ought to be done to day, let me exhort you,

* Eccles. ix. 10.

IV. To be every day prepared for whatever to-morrow may bring forth. There is a certain preparation for the vicissitudes of life, in which the multitude are sufficiently busied; providing, as they think, against whatever may happen, by increasing their riches, and strengthening themselves by friends, connections, and worldly honours. But these bulwarks which they erect, are totally insufficient against the dreaded storm. It is to some other quarter we must look for our defence; for when it is the world itself, whose changes we have reason to dread, the world, and the things of it, cannot afford us protection. The best preparation for all the uncertainties of futurity consists, in a well-ordered mind, a good conscience, and a cheerful submission to the will of Heaven. You know not what shall be on to-morrow. But there is one who knows it well; for his decree hath fixed it. To him look up with reverence; and say, "*Not my will, but thine be done;* what thou "appointest is ever wise, and just, and good." Seek to fulfil the part which he hath assigned you; to do the things which he hath commanded you to do; and leave all the rest to him. Whatever to-morrow brings forth, let it find you employed *in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God;* and then you shall meet to-morrow without fear, when you meet it without the upbraidings of guilt.

If it shall bring forth to you any unexpected good, prepare to receive it with gratitude, temperance, and modesty. If it shall bring forth evil, prepare to receive it with manly fortitude. Let no events of any kind derange your equanimity, or shake your constancy. Contract your desires, and moderate your hopes. Expect not more from the world than

it is able to afford you. Take it for granted, that what is naturally mutable, will one day change; that what was designed to be transient, will pass away.—Look forward to futurity without impatience. Be not desirous to know it. It belongs to God. Let him bring forward the events of the world, in his own way. Imagine that you continually hear those words, which our Lord once addressed to Peter, when he was enquiring about what was to happen to a fellow-disciple, *What is that to thee? Follow thou me.* Amidst all the uncertainty of future events, this road of clear and plain duty lies before you; follow Christ, and enquire no farther. Seek no crooked path, in order to avoid impending dangers. *Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left;* but *commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring to pass the desires of thy heart.*

V. Build your hopes of happiness on somewhat more solid and lasting than what either to-day or to-morrow are likely to produce. From what has been said, you may clearly perceive, that he who rests wholly upon this world, builds his house upon the sand. This life, by means of wisdom and virtue, may be rendered to a good man, a tolerable, nay, a comfortable state. But he who expects complete happiness from it, will be greatly deceived. Man, in his most flourishing condition, were much to be pitied, if he was destitute of every higher hope. Rolling from change to change, throughout all the days of his life, with a dark and unknown prospect always before him in futurity, what would avail a few short interrupted glimpses of happiness, which, from time to time, he was permitted to enjoy? Can

we believe, that only for such a state as this, man was designed by his great and good Creator? — No: Let us *bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* Here is the Rock on which the mind, however tossed by the storms of life, can securely rest. Here is the object to which a wise man will bend his chief attention, that, after having acted his part on earth with fidelity and honour, he may be enabled, through the merits of his Saviour, to look for a place in the mansions of eternal and untroubled peace. This prospect is the great corrective of the present vanity of human life. It gives significancy and importance to its most transitory scenes; and, in the midst of its mutability, discovers one fixed point of rest. He who is habitually influenced by the hope of immortality, will be able to look without dismay on the changes of the world. He will neither boast of to-morrow, nor be afraid of it; but will pass through the varieties of life with a manly and unbroken mind; with a noble superiority to those fears and expectations, those cares and sorrows, which agitate the multitude. — Such are the native effects of Christian faith and hope. To them alone it belongs, to surmount all the discouragements to which we are now exposed; to render our life comfortable, and our death blessed; nay, to make *the day of our death better than the day of our birth.*

SERMON LXIX.

On following the Multitude to do Evil.

Exodus, xxiii. 2.

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil. —

IN this world, we are placed as companions and assistants to one another. Depending, for most of the comforts of life, on mutual intercourse and aid, it was necessary, that we should be formed to desire the company, and to take pleasure in the good-will, of our fellows. But this sociability of man, though essential to his present condition, has, like many other good principles, been unhappily warped from its original purpose; and in the present state of the world, has proved the cause of much evil. For, as vice has abounded in every age, it hath propagated itself much more easily by the assistance of this social disposition. We naturally mould ourselves on the pattern of prevailing manners; and corruption is communicated from one to another. By mutually giving, and taking, the example of sinful liberties, licentiousness spreads and grows; each justifies himself by his neighbour; and the multitude of sinners strengthens one another's hands to commit iniquity. In all the ages of the world, custom has had more power than reason. Few take the trouble of enquiring what is the right path; the greater part

content themselves with following that in which the multitude have gone before them. No exhortation, therefore, is more necessary to be frequently given, and to be seriously enforced, than that which we receive from the text; *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*

To acquire a full view of any danger to which we are exposed, is the first measure to be taken in order to our safety. Let us then begin the subject with considering how much we are in hazard of being misled into vice by the general manners which we behold around us. — No virtue is more necessary to a Christian, but scarcely is there any more difficult to be put in practice, than that firmness of mind which can enable a man to maintain his principles, and stand his ground against the torrent of custom, fashion, and example. Example has upon all minds a secret and insinuating influence, even when we ourselves are insensible of its operation. We imperceptibly slide into some resemblance of the manners of those with whom we have frequent intercourse. This often shows itself, in the most indifferent things. But the resemblance is still more readily contracted, when there is something within ourselves, that leans to the same side which is countenanced by the practice of others. We are always glad to find any apology for indulging our inclinations and passions; and the example of the multitude too readily suggests that apology. Even before corruption has made great progress in our hearts, sometimes mere complaisance and good-nature incline us to fall in with the ways of others. Sometimes timidity and false shame prevent our differing from them:

Frequently expectation and interest impel us strongly to comply. How great is the danger we incur, when, in times of prevailing vice, all these principles of imitation and compliance unite together against our virtue?

The world is too justly said by Scripture, to *lie in wickedness*: it is a school wherein every vice is taught, and too easily learned. Even from our earliest childhood, false sentiments are instilled into our minds. We are bred up in admiration of the external show of life. We are accustomed, as soon as we can understand any thing, to hear riches and honours spoken of as the chief goods of men, and proposed to us as the objects to which our future pursuits are to be directed. We see the measures of outward respect and deference taken from these alone. Religion and virtue are recommended to us, in a formal manner, by our teachers and instructors; but all improvements of the mind and heart are visibly placed, by the world, in an inferior rank to the advantages of fortune. Vices that chance to be fashionable, are treated as slight failings; and coloured over, in common discourse, with those soft and gentle names which express no condemnation. We enter, perhaps, on the world, with good principles, and an aversion to downright vice. But when, as we advance in life, we become initiated in that mystery of iniquity, which is called the way of the world; when we meet with deceit and artifice in all ranks of men; when we behold iniquity, authorised by great names, and often rewarded with success and advancement, our original good impressions too soon decay. The practice of the multitude renders vice familiar to our thoughts; and gradually wears

off the abhorrence with which we once beheld it. We begin to think, that what is so very general, cannot be highly criminal. The malignity of sin appears diminished, by so many being sharers in the reproach; and instead of men's vices detracting, as they ought to do, from our good opinion of the men, our attachment to the men oftener reconciles us to the vices of which they are guilty.

The countenance which sin receives from the practice of the multitude, not only remove the restraints which are imposed by modesty and shame; but, such is the degeneracy of the world, the shame is too often employed against the cause of religion and virtue. The ridicule of the giddy and unthinking bears down the conviction of the sober and modest. Against their own belief, they appear to adopt the notions of the infidel; and against their own choice, they join in the vices of the libertine; that they may not be reproached as persons of a narrow mind, and still enslaved to the prejudices of education. How much reason is there to believe that, merely from this timidity of temper, many, whose principles are on the side of religion and virtue, are nevertheless found *walking in the way of sinners, and sitting in the chair of the scornful?* — Interest, too, often coincides with this weakness of disposition, in tempting such persons to follow the multitude. To fall in with the prevailing taste, to suit themselves to the passions of the great, or to the humours of the low, with whom they chance to be connected, appears the readiest way to rise in the world. Hence they are naturally led to relinquish the firmness of an upright character, for that supple and versable turn, which accommodates itself to the times, and assumes whatever ap-

pearance seems most convenient for interest. ——. Such are the dangers to which we are exposed, in times of corruption, of *following the multitude to do evil;* dangers which require our most serious attention and care, in order to guard ourselves against them. — I proceed to lay such considerations before you as may be useful for that purpose.

In the *first* place, Let us remember that the multitude are very bad guides; are so far from having a title to implicit regard, that he who blindly follows them may be presumed to err. For prejudice and passion are known to sway the crowd. They are struck by the outside of things; they enquire superficially, admire false appearances, and pursue false goods. Their opinions are for the most part hastily formed, and of course are variable, floating, and inconsistent. In every age, how small is the number of those who are guided by reason and calm enquiry? How few do we find, who have the wisdom to think and judge for themselves, and have steadiness to follow out their own judgment? Ignorance, and low education, darken the views of the vulgar. Fashion and prejudice, vanity and pleasure, corrupt the sentiments of the great. The example of neither affords any standard of what is right and wise. If the philosopher, when employed in the pursuit of truth, finds it necessary to disregard established prejudices and popular opinion, shall we, in the more important enquiry after the rule of life, submit to such blind guidance as the practice of the many; esteeming whatever they admire; and following wherever they lead? Be assured, that he who sets up the general opinion as the standard of truth, or the

general practice as the measure of right, is likely, upon such a foundation, to build no other superstructure except vice and folly. — If the practice of the multitude be a good pattern for our imitation, their opinions surely should be as good a rule for our belief. Upon this principle, we must exchange Christianity for Paganism or Mahometanism, and the light of the Reformation for the superstitions of Popery; for these latter have ever had, and still have, the numbers and the multitude on their side. — Our Saviour has sufficiently characterised the way of the world, when he describes the *broad road* in which the multitudes go, as the *road which leads to destruction;* and the path which leads to happiness, as a *narrow path*, which fewer find. From which it is an easy inference, that to have the multitude on our side, is so far from affording any presumption of our being safe, that it should lead us to suspect that we are holding the course of danger.

In the *second* place, As the practice of the multitude is no argument of a good practice, so it cannot afford us either justification, or safety, in what is evil. — It affords us, I say, no justification. Truth and error, virtue and vice, are things of immutable nature. The difference between them is grounded on that basis of eternal reason, which no opinions or customs of men can affect or alter. Whether virtue be esteemed or not, in the world, this makes it neither more nor less estimable in itself. It carries always a Divine authority, which men cannot impair. It shines with an essential lustre, which praise cannot brighten, nor reproach tarnish. It has a right to regulate the opinions of men; but by their opinions cannot

be controlled. Its nature continues invariably the same, though all the multitude of fools should concur in endeavouring to turn it into ridicule. *Woe unto them*, says the prophet Isaiah, *that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.**

As the practice of the multitude furnishes no justification to the sinner, so neither does it afford him any safety. Religion is altogether a matter of personal concern. God hath delivered to every man the rule of life; and every man must think and act for himself; because for himself he is to answer. If others be wicked, it will be the worse for them; but it will not, on that account, be the better for us, if we shall be evil also. Let vice be ever so prevalent, it is still that *evil thing which the Lord abhorreth*; and, *though hand join in hand*, the wicked shall not escape unpunished. So far is the number of offenders from furnishing any ground of safety, that it calls more loudly for Divine justice to interpose. It is as easy for the Almighty arm to crush a whole guilty society as to punish a single individual; and when the disobedient subjects of God countenance and strengthen one another in licentiousness, by transgressing in troops and bands, it becomes high time for his government to exert itself, and let his vengeance forth. — One could scarcely think that any professor of Christian faith would fancy to himself any apology

* Isaiah, v. 20. 24.

from the way of the world, when he knows that the declared design of his religion was, to distinguish him from the world, which is said to *lie in sin;* and that Christ came to call out for himself *a peculiar people,* whose character it should be, *not to be conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewing of their mind.*—So little, indeed, can the practice of the world either justify or extenuate vice, that it deserves our serious consideration.

In the *third* place, Whether there be not several circumstances, which peculiarly aggravate the guilt of those who follow the multitude in evil? Do you not, thereby, strengthen the power of sin, and perpetuate the pernicious influence of bad example? By striking off from the corrupted crowd, you might be eminently useful; you might animate and recover many, whom weakness and timidity keep under bondage to the customs of the world: Whereas, by tamely yielding to the current of vice, you render that current stronger for carrying others along; you add weight and stability to the bad cause; you lend to the multitude all the force of your example, for drawing others after them to the commission of evil.—While you are thus accessory to the ruin of others, you are, at the same time, stamping your own character with the foulest and deepest impressions of corruption. By surrendering your judgment, and your conscience, to the multitude, you betray the rights, and degrade the honour, of the rational nature. Nothing great or worthy can be expected of him, who, instead of considering what is right in itself, and what part it is fittest for one in his station to act, is only considering what the world will think

or say of him; what sort of behaviour will pass with the fairest show, and be most calculated to please the many. When a man has thus given up the liberty and independence of his mind, we can no longer reckon upon him in any thing. We cannot tell how far he may be carried in vice. There is too much ground to dread, that he will lie, dissemble, and betray; changing himself, without scruple, into every shape that will find favour among those whom he seeks to gain.—While this servility to the world infers baseness towards men, it involves also the highest impiety towards God. It shows that we yield to the world that reverence and submission which is only due to the Divine law. We treat the government of the Almighty with scorn; as if his precepts deserved to be obeyed, only when they suited the caprice and the follies of the multitude; and were entitled to no regard, as soon as they contradicted the reigning customs and fashions of the world.—While such conduct carries in it so much wickedness and folly, let us observe,

In the *fourth* place, That the most excellent and honourable character which can adorn a man and a Christian, is acquired by resisting the torrent of vice, and adhering to the cause of God and virtue, against a corrupted multitude. It will be found to hold, in general, that all those who, in any of the great lines of life, have distinguished themselves for thinking profoundly, and acting nobly, have despised popular prejudices, and departed, in several things, from the common ways of the world. On no occasion is this more requisite for true honour, than where religion and morality are concerned. In times of prevailing

licentiousness, to maintain unblemished virtue, and uncorrupted integrity; in a public or private cause, to stand firm by what is fair and just, amidst discouragements and opposition; despising groundless censure and reproach; disdaining all compliance with public manners, when they are vicious and unlawful; and never ashamed of the punctual discharge of every duty towards God and man; — this is what shows true greatness of spirit, and will force approbation even from the degenerate multitude themselves. "This is the man," their conscience will oblige them to acknowledge, "whom we are "unable to bend to mean condescensions. We see "it in vain either to flatter or to threaten him; "he rests on a principle within, which we cannot "shake. To this man you may, on any occasion, "safely commit your cause. He is incapable of "betraying his trust, or deserting his friend, or "denying his faith." Thus *his righteousness comes forth as the light, and his judgment as the noon day.*

It is, accordingly, this steady inflexible virtue, this regard to principle, superior to all custom and opinion, which peculiarly mark the characters of those, in any age, who have shone as saints or heroes; and has consecrated their memory to all posterity. It was this that obtained to ancient *Enoch* the most singular testimony of honour from Heaven. He continued to *walk with God*, when the world apostatised from him. He pleased God, and was beloved of him; so that living among sinners, he was translated to heaven without seeing death; *Yea, speedily was he taken away, lest wickedness should have altered his understanding, or deceit beguiled his soul.* * When

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 11.

Sodom could not furnish ten righteous men to save it, *Lot* remained unspotted amidst the contagion. He lived like an angel among spirits of darkness; and the destroying flame was not permitted to go forth, till the good man was called away by a heavenly messenger from his devoted city. When *all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth*, then lived *Noah*, a righteous man, and a preacher of righteousness. He stood alone, and was scoffed by the profane crew. But they by the deluge were swept away; while on him, Providence conferred the immortal honour, of being the restorer of a better race, and the father of a new world. Such examples as these, and such honours conferred by God on them who withstood the multitude of evil doers, should often be present to our minds. Let us oppose them to the numbers of low and corrupt examples which we behold around us; and when we are in hazard of being swayed by such, let us fortify our virtue, by thinking of those who, in former times, shone like stars in the midst of surrounding darkness, and are now shining in the kingdom of heaven, *as the brightness of the firmament, for ever and ever.* — As our honour is thus deeply concerned in our acting a stedfast and virtuous part, let us also consider,

In the *fifth* place, How little, in point of interest, can be gained by the favour of the multitude, and how much will certainly be lost, by following them to do evil. We may, thereby, render ourselves more agreeable to some with whom we are connected; and by artful compliances, may please ourselves with the prospect of promoting our fortune. But these advantages, such as they are, remain doubtful and uncer-

tain. The wind of popular opinion is ever shifting. It will often leave us at a loss what course to steer; and, after all our trouble and anxiety to catch the favourable gale, it may on a sudden forsake us. For the versatility of character, the meanness and inconsistency of conduct, into which a dependant on the multitude is betrayed, frequently render him, in the end, an object of contempt to those whom he sought to please. But supposing him successful in his views, no worldly advantages, which are purchased by dishonourable means, can be either solid or lasting. They bring no genuine satisfaction to a man, who is conscious to himself of having given up his principles to serve the world. As long as he could be satisfied with his own conduct, he might bear up under undeserved discouragement; but when he becomes despicable in his own eyes, worldly honours lose their lustre. — What can the multitude do for you, after you have followed them in evil? They cannot restore to you the peace of an innocent mind, nor heal the sorrows of a wounded spirit, nor shield you from the displeasure of God. They can do little to support you in the hour of affliction, and nothing to deliver your souls in the day of death. Forsaken and disconsolate, the world, for the most part, casts off its votaries in the end; and when we compute the final amount, it will prove a very small consolation, that, as you have had sharers in guilt, you shall have companions also in punishment.

Look forward to the issue of things. The multitude of men possess now, in a great measure, the distribution of praise and censure, of success and disappointment, according to their caprice. But this confused and promiscuous distribution is not

always to subsist. The day cometh, when we all are to appear before a more discerning Judge, and a more impartial tribunal. The day cometh, when our Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven in all the glory of his Father to unveil every character, and to *render to every man according to his works.* At that day how shall he lift up his head, who hath been all his life the slave of the world's opinion; who hath moulded his principles, and his practice, solely to please the multitude; who hath been *ashamed of his Saviour and his words;* and, to gain favour with men, hath apostatised from the native sentiments and dictates of his heart?—To say all in one word: there is a contest now between God and the world. These form the opposite sides which divide mankind. Consider well, to which of these you will choose to adhere. On the one side, lie your allegiance, your honour, and your interest; on the other, lie your guilt and your shame. For the one, conscience and reason; for the other, passion and inclination, plead. On the one hand are the approbation of God, immortal honour, and divine rewards; on the other,—remember and beware!—are the stings of conscience, endless punishment, and endless infamy.

SERMON LXX.

On the Wisdom of God.*

1 Timothy, i. 17.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever! Amen.

It is of the highest importance to religious conduct, that our minds be filled with suitable conceptions of the attributes of God. They are the foundations of our reverence for him; and reverence is the foundation of religion. All the divine perfections are interesting to man. Almighty power, in conjunction with Eternity and Omnipresence, naturally inspire solemn awe. Infinite Goodness relieves the mind from that oppression which Power alone would produce; and from our experience of present benefits, and our remembrance of the past, creates love, gratitude, and trust. In the middle between these stands the contemplation of Divine Wisdom, which conjoins impressions of awe with those of comfort; and, while it humbles us into profound submission, encourages, at the same time, our reliance on that

* This concluding discourse was chiefly intended to be a general recapitulation of instances of the wisdom of Providence, several of which have been more fully illustrated in other discourses contained in this or in some of the preceding volumes.

King eternal, immortal, and invisible, who is justly styled in the text, *the only wise God.*

Among men, wisdom is a quality entirely different from cunning or craft. It always supposes good and fair intention in the person who possesses it; and imports that laudable ends are pursued by proper and justifiable means. In like manner, wisdom in the Supreme Being cannot be separated from the rectitude of his nature. It is, in him, an exertion of benevolence; and imports, that the purposes of justice and goodness are carried on and accomplished by means the most effectual. To meditate on some of those instances in which this Divine wisdom is displayed cannot but be highly favourable to the impressions both of piety and of virtue.

It is difficult to say, whether the natural, or the moral, world, afford the most conspicuous and striking displays of the wisdom of God. Not one, nor many discourses, nor indeed the study and labour of a whole life, were, in any degree, sufficient to explore them. Of the proofs of wisdom which the natural world affords I cannot attempt now to discourse. Any illustration of these would lead to discussions of a scientific kind, which more properly belong to the philosopher; and on which philosophy has often employed itself, with much utility and honour. I shall only take notice, that, in proportion as human knowledge hath enlarged its sphere of research and discovery, in the same proportion hath the wisdom of the Creator struck the minds of all enquirers and observers, with the highest admiration. All nature is in truth a scene of wonders. In the disposition of

the heavenly bodies, and the general arrangement of the system of the universe; in the structure of the earth; in the endless variety of living creatures that fill it; and in the provision made for them all, to enable them to fulfil the ends of their being; it is not easy to determine, whether power, wisdom, or goodness, be most conspicuous. It belongs not only to *the heavens to declare the glory of God, and to the firmament to show forth his handy work;* in the smallest and most inconsiderable, as well as in the most illustrious works of God; equal marks appear of profound design and consummate art. It has been justly said, that there is not a vegetable that grows, nor an insect that moves, but what is sufficient to confound the atheist, and to afford the candid observer endless materials of devout adoration and praise.

When we turn to the moral world, the field of admiration which opens to us is no less extensive and striking. I can only mention a few instances of that exquisite wisdom which every where meets us.

In the *first* place, let us attend to the constitution of human nature. Though we are taught by revelation to consider it as now impaired by the fall, yet as it stands we behold the traces of the noble structure, planned and executed with the highest skill. All the powers and faculties bestowed on man are such, as perfectly suit his condition, and adapt him to the purposes for which he was designed. Senses were given him that he might distinguish what is necessary for the preservation and welfare of his body.——Now, suppose, that any one of those

senses, the sight, for instance, or the hearing, or the touch, had been in a considerable degree either more blunt, or more acute, than it is at present, what an unhappy change would this have made upon our state? On the one hand, greater imperfection of the organs would have deprived us of all the comfort and advantage which we now enjoy from such powers. On the other hand, a greater degree of exquisite sensibility in them would have rendered life a burden to us. Our senses, instead of being inlets to knowledge and pleasure, would then have become constant avenues to uneasiness and pain. Their powers, therefore, are skilfully adjusted to that measure of strength, which allows them to answer the purposes of health, safety, and comfort; without either falling short of this line of usefulness, or improperly, and hurtfully, stretching beyond it.

In the mind, appetites and passions were placed, as the moving powers of the soul, to impel its activity. But as their impulse required regulation and restraint, reason was, at the same time, conferred as the directing power. —— Of all our passions, self-love and the desire of self-preservation were, with the utmost propriety, made the strongest, for a reason which the meanest capacity may comprehend. Every man is most immediately committed by Providence to his own care and charge. He knows his own situation best; and has more opportunities of promoting his own happiness, than he can have of advancing the happiness of any other person. It was therefore fit and wise, that, by the strongest instinct, he should be prompted to attend to himself. — At the same time, as no man standing alone is sufficient for his own welfare, it was necessary that, by mutual sympathy and social

instincts, we should be drawn to give aid to one another. Here it deserves our particular notice, that the force of those social instincts is, with admirable propriety, proportioned by Providence to the degree of their usefulness and importance.* Thus, that parental affection, which the helpless state of infancy and childhood renders so needful, is made the strongest of them all. Next, come those ties of blood, which prompt mutual kindness among those who are intimately joined together by brotherhood, and other family connections. To these succeeds that valuable instinct of pity, which impels us to assist the distressed, wherever we behold them. To take part with others in their good fortune belongs to man's social nature, and increases the sum of happiness. At the same time, to take part with the prosperous is less necessary than to sympathise with the unhappy; and therefore the principle which prompts us to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, is made not to be so strong as that which impels us to *weep with them that weep.*

But they are not only the laudable and important parts of our disposition, which discover the wisdom of the author of our frame; even our imperfections and follies are by him rendered subservient to useful ends. — Amidst those inequalities of condition, for instance, which the state of human life required, where it was necessary that some should be rich, and others poor, that some should be eminent and distinguished, and others obscure and mean, how seasonable is that good opinion which every one entertains of himself, that

* See Serm. XXXII. Vol. ii.

self-complacency with which he compares himself to others; and that fond hope, which is ever pleasing him with the prospect of future pleasures aud advantages in life? Without those flattering sensations, vain as they often are, how totally insupportable would this world become to many of its inhabitants? Whereas, by means of them, Providence hath contrived to balance, in a great measure, the inequalities of condition among mankind. It hath contrived to diffuse pleasure through all ranks; and to bring the high and the low nearer to a level with each other, than might at first be supposed. It hath smoothed the most rugged tracts of human life; and hath gilded with rays of borrowed light its most dreary scenes.

One instance of Divine Wisdom, in framing our nature, is so remarkable as to demand particular attention; that is, the measure according to which God hath dispensed knowledge and ignorance to man. There is nothing of which we are more ready to complain, than of our narrow and confined views of nature, and of Providence, and of all things around us? And yet upon examination, it will be found, that our views extend, on every side, just as far as they ought; and that, to see and know more than is allowed us, instead of bringing any advantage, would produce certain misery.* —— We pry, for instance, with impatient curiosity, into future events. Happily for us, they are veiled and covered up; and one peep behind that veil, were it permitted, would be sufficient to poison the whole comfort of our days, by the anticipation of sorrows to come. — In like manner, we often wish with eagerness to penetrate

* See Serm. II. Vol. i. and Serm. LIX. in this Vol.

into the secrets of nature, to look into the invisible world, and to be made acquainted with the whole destiny of man. Our wish is denied; we are environed on all hands with mystery; and that mystery is our happiness: for, were those great invisible objects fully disclosed, the sight of them would confound and overwhelm us. It would either totally derange our feeble faculties, or would engross our attention to such a degree, as to lay us aside from the business and concerns of this world. It would have the same effect, as if we were carried away from the earth, and mingled among the inhabitants of some other planet. — The knowledge that is allowed to us, was designed to fit us for acting our part in our present state. At the exact point, therefore, where usefulness ends, knowledge stops, and ignorance commences. Light shines upon us, as long as it serves to guide our path; but forsakes us, as soon as it becomes noxious to the eye; and salutary darkness is appointed to close the scene. — Thoughtless and stupid must that man be, who, in all this furniture of the human mind, in this exact adjustment of its several powers to the great purposes of life, discerns not the hand of adorable Wisdom, as well as of infinite Goodness.

In the *second* place, Let us contemplate the same wisdom as exhibiting itself to us in the moral government of the world. We are informed by revelation, that this life is designed by Providence to be an introductory part of existence to intelligent beings; a state of education and discipline, where creatures, fallen from their original rank, may gradually recover their rectitude and virtue. Under this view, which

is in itself perfectly consonant to all that reason discovers, we shall find the general course of human affairs, confused as it may sometimes appear, to have been ordered with exquisite wisdom. — It was necessary to such a state, that all the active powers of man should be brought forth into exercise, and completely tried. It became proper, therefore, that there should be a mixture of characters in the world, and that men should be shown in a variety of situations.* Hence that diversity of tempers and dispositions which is found in society; those inequalities in rank and station, which we see taking place; and those different talents and inclinations which prompt men to different pursuits. By these means, every department in society is filled up; and every man has some sphere prepared for him, in which he can act. He is brought forth as on a busy stage, where opportunity is given for his character to display itself fully. — His life is, with great propriety, varied by interchanges of prosperity and adversity. Always prosperous, he would become dissipated, indolent, and giddy: always afflicted, he would be fretful, dejected, and sullen. There are few persons, therefore, or none, whose lot shares not of both these states; in order that every disposition of the heart may be explored, and every mean of improvement afforded. — As man is ultimately designed for a higher state of existence than the present, it was not proper that this world should prove a paradise to him, or should afford him that complete satisfaction which he incessantly pursues. Disappointments, therefore, are often made to blast his hopes; and, even while the comforts of life last, they are always mixed with

* See Serm. LIV. Vol. ii.

some troubles; in order that an excessive attachment to this world may gradually be loosened. The course of things is evidently so ordered by Providence, that occurrences shall be always happening, to bring down the most prosperous to a level with the rest of his brethren, and to raise up, in their turn, the low and the distressed.

In the midst of those vicissitudes, which are so obviously conducive to improvement, both wisdom and goodness required, that the Supreme Governor of the world should be seen to protect the interests, and favour the side of virtue. But in the degree of evidence, with which this was to be shown, it was no less requisite, that a proper temperament should be observed. Had virtue been always completely rewarded, and made happy on earth, men would no longer have had a motive for aspiring to a more blessed state. In the case of every crime, had Divine justice interposed to bring complete punishment on the head of the criminal; or had all the felicity which is prepared for the just in a future world, and all the misery which there awaits the wicked, been already displayed to the view, and rendered sensible to the feelings of men; there would have been an end of that state of trial, for which our whole condition on earth was intended. It was necessary, therefore, that at present, we should *see through a glass darkly*. A certain degree of mystery and obscurity was, with perfect wisdom, left on the conduct of the Almighty.* — But, amidst that obscurity sufficient encouragement and support are in the mean time given to virtue; sufficient ground is afforded for the full belief, that it is what the Deity loves, and will finally reward. His

* See Serm. IV. Vol. i.

approbation of it is signified to every man by the voice of conscience. Inward satisfaction and peace are made always to belong to it; and general esteem and honour for the most part to attend to it. On the other hand, the wicked, in no situation of life, are allowed to be truly happy. Their vices and their passions are made to trouble their posterity; and their punishment to grow out of their crimes. Let any one attentively recollect the material incidents of his life; and he will, for the most part, be able to trace the chief misfortunes which have befallen him to some guilt he has contracted, or some folly he has committed.* Such is the profound wisdom with which Providence conducts its counsels, that although it does not appear to interpose, men are made to reap from their actions the fruits which they had deserved; their iniquities *to correct them, and their backslidings to reprove them;* and while they suffer, they are forced to acknowledge the justice of their punishment.—These are not matters of rare or occasional observation; but deeply interwoven with the texture of human affairs. They discover a regular plan, a formed system, according to which the whole train of Providence proceeds; and which manifests to every serious observer the consummate wisdom of its Author.—As thus, in the constitution of human nature and in the moral government of the world, Divine wisdom so remarkably appears, I must observe,

In the *third* place, That in the redemption of the world, and in the economy of grace, it shines no less conspicuously. The subject which opens to us here is too extensive to be fully illustrated at present; but

* See Serm. LXIII. Vol. iii.

the great lines of it are obvious. * — In carrying on a plan, by which forgiveness was to be dispensed to an offending race, wisdom required that the authority of the legislator should be fully preserved, and no such relaxation be introduced into government, as might give licence or encouragement to offenders. Accordingly, the most admirable provision was made for these important purposes by the interposition of the Son of God suffering and dying for sinners. The sovereign awe of justice is maintained, while justice is tempered with mercy. Men are bound to righteousness, under the highest sanctions; and ample security and consolation are, at the same time, afforded to the penitent. By the instructions, and example, of their Saviour, they are instructed in their duty; and through a Mediator and Intercessor, they are encouraged to offer their worship and prayers to the Almighty. They are assured that, in whatever is too arduous for human nature to perform, they shall be assisted by a Divine Spirit; and under all trials and difficulties, they are supported by the express promise of that eternal life which is brought to light by the Gospel. — It is not possible for the understanding to conceive any method of salvation, planned with more goodness and executed with more wisdom, than what is shown in the Gospel of Christ. The consideration of this constitution alone, gives us full reason to join in that exclamation of the Apostle: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* †

* See Serm. V. Vol. i. — Serm. XX. Vol. i. — Serm. XXV. Vol. ii. — Serm. LV. Vol. ii.

† Rom. xi. 33.

FROM this short survey which we have taken of Divine wisdom, as discovering itself, in the whole complex frame of the moral world; in the constitution of human nature; in the government of human affairs; and in the redemption of the human race; we cannot but perceive how much reason we have to prostrate ourselves before God, and with all humility to worship and adore.—When we view that immense structure of the universe in which we dwell, when we think of Him, whose wisdom has planned the whole system of being; whose mind comprehends, whose counsels direct, the whole course of events, from the beginning to the end of time; by whom nothing is so inconsiderable as to be overlooked, or so transient as to be forgotten; who attends to the concerns of the poor man in his cottage, while he is steering the sun and the moon in their course through the heavens; into what astonishment and self-annihilation do we fall! Before him all our boasted knowledge is ignorance, and our wisdom is folly. Wherever we cast our eyes on his works and ways, we find all things adjusted in *number, weight, and measure;* and after all that we can survey, Lo! these are but a part of his ways; and *how small a portion is heard of him!*

It is the power of God, which produces among the multitude of men any impressions of religion. When thunder roars in the heavens, or an earthquake shakes the ground, they are struck with awe, and disposed to worship an invisible power. But such impressions of Deity are occasional and transitory. The lasting reverence of a Supreme Being arises, in a well-informed mind, from the display of that infinite wisdom which all the universe presents. Its operations are

constantly, though silently, going on around us. We may view it in the peaceful and sedate state of the universe, as well as in its greatest commotions; we behold it in every insect that moves on the ground, at the same time that we admire it in the revolutions of the celestial bodies. Happy for us if the contemplation shall nourish that temper of habitual devotion, which so well becomes dependent beings, and is so intimately connected with all virtue! *

But the chief effect that ought to be produced by meditation on the Divine wisdom, is perfect resignation to the Governor of the universe, and entire trust in his administration. Our private misfortunes and disappointments are too often the subject of querulous complaints, and even of unjust suspicions of Providence. But when in the whole natural and moral world, we behold an arrangement of things which plainly discovers the most consummate wisdom, can we believe, that in the arrangement of our petty concerns, this wisdom is dormant and neglectful? How much more reason is there to think, that our ignorance of the Divine plans misleads our judgment, than that the wisdom of the Almighty has erred in directing our private affairs? — Divine wisdom, as I observed in the beginning, is an exertion of Divine benevolence. It has, it can have, no other scope than to accomplish the best ends by the most proper means. Let the wisdom, therefore, and the goodness, of the Deity, be ever conjoined in our idea. Let every new discovery of Divine wisdom, be a new ground of hope, of joy, and of cordial submission, to every virtuous man. Let him be thankful that he

* See Serm. XLIX. Vol. ii.

lives in a world, where nothing happens to him by chance, or at random; but where a great, a wise, and beneficent Mind continually superintends every event.

Under the faith of this great principle of religion, let us proceed, in the course of our duty, with stedfast and undismayed mind. Let us retain faithful allegiance to our Creator and our Redeemer; and then we may always hope the best; and *cast our care upon him who careth for us. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. Although thou sayest, thou canst not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.*—— Let us begin every undertaking with an humble dependence on his assistance for enabling us to prosecute it to the end. When our undertakings are finished, and the close of life approaches, with praise to him let us conclude all our labours.

Unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever! Amen.

SERMON LXXI.

The Compassion and Beneficence of the Deity.

[Preached before the Society for the Benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the Established Church of Scotland, 20th May 1766.]

Jeremiah, xlix. 11.

Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.

NO subject is more open to general observation, or more confirmed by manifold experience, than the goodness of God. The contemplation of the universe in which we dwell, presents it perpetually to our view. Amidst the vast extent of creation, we discover no instance of mere pomp, or useless grandeur, but behold every thing contributing to the general good, and rendered subservient to the welfare of the rational or sensible world. In the administration of Providence, the same principle of beneficence is conspicuous. The seasons are made regularly to return, and the earth to flourish; supply is bountifully provided for the wants of all creatures; and numberless comforts are prepared to sweeten human life. Most justly is he who hath established, and who upholds, this admirable order of things, to be esteemed the Father of mercies: and, accordingly, in this view, he is often celebrated in Scripture. *The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.*

His tender mercies are over all his works. His mercy is great unto the heavens, and it endureth for ever.

It appears worthy of particular observation that there is one light, in which more frequently than in any other, the goodness of God is presented to us in the Sacred Writings, namely, the light of compassion to the distresses of mankind. Most of the situations are mentioned in which men are considered as most forlorn; and in some passages of Scripture, God is represented as interesting himself, in a peculiar manner, for those who are in such situations. Particular emphasis is always laid upon this circumstance, in the general views which are given of his goodness. He is the *Hearer of prayer, unto whom all flesh shall come.* But he is described as listening with particular attention to the *cry of the poor;* and *regarding the prayer of the destitute: He will prepare their heart, and cause his ear to hear.* All creatures are the objects of his providential care. But *the widow and the fatherless, the bowed down and the broken in heart,* are particularly attended to, and commiserated by him. *The Lord executeth judgment for the oppressed; the Lord preserveth the stranger; he looseth the prisoner, and giveth food to the hungry. He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor hides he his face from them; but hears when they cry unto him.** In short, when we are deprived of all human consolation and aid, the Almighty is represented as then most accessible to our prayers, and most disposed to help and relieve us.

* Ps. cii. 17.; x. 17.; lxviii. 5.; lxix. 33.; cxlvi. 7.; xxii. 24, &c. &c.

The words which I have chosen for the text afford a very amiable view of that compassion which Scripture so often ascribes to the Supreme Being. The context in which they stand contains much dark and mysterious prophecy relating to nations in the neighbourhood of Judea, but leads to no particular illustration of the text. The words of it, taken by themselves, are plainly to be understood as spoken by God to an aged parent, who, in the view of approaching dissolution, is anxious about the future condition of his family in the world; and they present a most affecting display of God's compassionate regard to the children of those who have been his faithful servants on earth. *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.* —— It will be worthy of our attention at present, to enquire into the reasons why the Almighty is pleased to represent himself so often to us under this view; not only as the just and good Ruler of the universe, which is the first and leading idea we naturally form of him, but as the Patron and Friend of the distressed part of mankind.

It will be found that there are two very important purposes which such discoveries of the Divine nature serve. First, they furnish particular ground for trusting in God, amidst all the vicissitudes of human life; and next, they exhibit the pattern of that disposition, which we ought, in our measure, humbly to follow and imitate.

I. The discoveries of Divine compassion were purposely intended to furnish to us particular ground for trust in God, amidst all the vicissitudes of human life. Man, during his abode on earth, is exposed to various distresses. Even in his most flourishing

state, his condition is extremely precarious. Prosperous as he may at one time seem to be, he cannot tell how soon, by some unforeseen vicissitude, he may be humbled to the dust; and still less can he tell what may in future befal his children, to whose fortunes he often looks with anxious solicitude. In the moments when his mind is oppressed, either by the immediate feeling of sorrows or by the dread of impending evils, it is natural for him to fly to that Supreme Being under whose direction all human events are placed, and earnestly to implore protection from him.——But though he hold the belief that justice and goodness are ever to be found at the throne of the Almighty, yet, even there, particular discouragements meet him. For that Supreme Being to whom he looks up is a great and awful Being. His nature is, to us, unknown. He dwells in the secret place of Eternity; and is surrounded with clouds and darkness. We hear his tremendous voice in the thunder; and in every commotion of the elements we behold the irresistible hand of his power. A nature so infinitely superior to our own, cannot be looked up to without some measure of dismay. It is overwhelming to the timid apprehensions of the distressed. It is contemplated with that awful and mysterious reverence which overpowers confidence and trust.

It is for this reason that, in condescension to human weakness, God has been pleased so often to represent himself as actuated by a principle of compassion and pity. This gives a shade and softening to the awful greatness of the Divinity. It brings down his goodness to the level of our conception, and fits it to be the object of our trust. Compassion is a principle which we all feel and know.

We know that it is the strongest of all benevolent instincts in our nature, and that it tends directly to interest us in behalf of those who need our aid. We are taught to believe that a similar attribute belongs to the Divine nature; in order that, from that species of goodness which we are best acquainted with, and which we can most rely upon, we may be trained both to love our Almighty Benefactor, and as long as we are in the practice of our duty, to trust to his protection, amidst every distress. When we hear such a voice of tenderness, as that which my text utters, proceeding from the Almighty, our hearts are comforted. Distrust and dismay are removed. We are no longer oppressed by his greatness. We can draw near to him as to a Father in heaven, before whom we can, with humble confidence, pour out our sorrows; and can trust that, though all our earthly friends should neglect us, our prayers will attract his compassionate regard.

Compassion to the unfortunate, as it is exerted among men, is indeed accompanied with certain disturbed and painful feelings, arising from sympathy with those whom we pity. But every such feeling we must remove from our thoughts, when we ascribe an affection of this nature to the Deity. It is true, that, in Scripture language, the Divine compassion is sometimes figured by strong allusions to the relenting struggles and passionate meltings of the human heart. But we easily perceive that such representations are to be understood with the allowances which figurative language requires. All that is amiable in compassion, belongs to God; but all that is imperfect in it must be left to man. In the Supreme Being, there can be no perturbation or uneasiness; no con-

trast of feelings, nor fluctuation of purpose. His compassion imports a kind regard to the circumstances of the unhappy. But still it is such a regard as suits the perfection of the great Governor of the universe, whose benignity, undisturbed by any violent emotion, ever maintains the same tranquil tenor, like the unruffled and uninterrupted serenity of the highest heavens.

It is important to observe, that this pity and compassion of our heavenly Father, extends itself to our moral and spiritual concerns, in like manner as to our natural and external distresses. In that great dispensation of the redemption of the world by his Son Jesus Christ, he is always represented in Scripture as moved by pity for our fallen and wretched estate. The same principle which leads him to regard with compassion the widow and the fatherless, led him to look down with compassion on an helpless and forlorn race, degraded from their original honour. From infinite mercy he sent his Son *to seek and to save that which was lost.* According to the prophetical language of the Old Testament, *He looked upon us; and his time was a time of love. He saw that there was no man; He beheld that there was no intercessor, and his own arm brought Salvation. He laid his help on one who was mighty to save. He saw us in our blood, and said, Live.* * —— Agreeable to this spirit of compassion, displayed in our redemption, is the whole dispensation of Divine grace towards man in his present state of infirmity. It speaks continually the doctrine of consolation and merciful aid; *grace to be sufficient for us, and strength to be made perfect in our*

* Ezek. xvi. 8. Isaiah, lix. 16.

weakness. As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. *

I cannot conclude this head without observing how much it adds to the value of the Christian religion, that it hath discovered the Deity to us in a light so amiable. When the nations of the earth worshipped a God unknown, or one whom they arrayed in nothing but vengeful thunders, the true God hath come forth from behind the cloud, and made himself known to us; known not only as a just and good Ruler, but as a compassionate Father, in whom, amidst all their distresses, the virtuous may trust and hope. I now proceed to observe,

II. That such discoveries of the Divine nature were designed, not only to administer encouragement and consolation, but also to exhibit the pattern of that disposition which we are bound, in our measure, to imitate and follow. To this purpose tend the repeated exhortations of Scripture, to *be followers of God, as dear children; to be merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful.* That hardness of heart which renders men insensible to the distresses of their brethren, that insolence of prosperity which inspires them with contempt of those who are fallen below them, are always represented in Scripture as dispositions most opposite to the nature of God, and most hateful in his sight. In order to make this appear in the strongest light, he hath turned his goodness chiefly into the channel of compassionate regard to those whom the selfish and the proud

* 2 Cor. xii. 9. Psal. ciii. 13.

despise. He hath avowedly taken up their cause, that he might state himself as an antagonist to such as would bear them down; that he might confound and put to the blush that arrogance of men which makes them slight any of their own brethren. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord, to set them in safety from him that puffeth at them.* * *Lord*, says the Psalmist, *thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt arise to judge the fatherless, and the oppressed, that the man of earth may oppress no more.* †

Consider, I beseech you, whether any virtue can admit of any higher recommendation than its being that disposition under the character of which the Almighty chooses to be peculiarly known to us: How can we claim any relation to the Father of mercies, or how look up to him for compassion and grace, if we show no bowels of mercy, gentleness, and kindness, to one another? — The whole plan, indeed, on which he hath formed human nature, and all the circumstances in which he hath placed us on earth, are plainly contrived to excite affections of benevolence, and to enforce works of mercy. Not only hath he planted compassion in the human breast, as one of the strongest instincts there, but he hath so connected us in society as necessarily to require that our benevolent instincts should be brought into exercise. For it is apparent that no man, in any rank of life, even the highest, is sufficient for his own well-being. He can neither supply his own wants, nor provide for his own comforts, without the co-operation of others. The dependence here is mutual between the high and the low, the rich

* Psal. xii. 5. † Psal. x. 17, 18.

and the poor. Each, in one way or other, calls on each for aid. All are so linked together, as to be impelled by a thousand motives to assist one another in the time of need. This is what nature, what society, what Providence, all speak with a loud voice; a voice which may be said to have gone forth even to the ends of the earth, and to have been heard and understood by the most barbarous tribes of men. For among savage and uncultivated nations, no less than among the most civilized and polished, the energy of compassion is felt, and its claims are recognized and obeyed.

In the course of human life, innumerable occasions present themselves for all the exercises of that humanity and benignity, to which we are so powerfully prompted. The diversities of rank among men, the changes of fortune to which all, in every rank, are liable, the necessities of the poor, the wants of helpless youth, the infirmities of declining age, are always giving opportunities for the display of humane affections. There is perhaps no form in which benevolence appears more interesting, than when it is employed in providing relief for the families and children of those who stand in need of aid, in order that the young may be trained up by proper education for acting a useful part in the world. Benefits conveyed by this channel are often more important than any other acts of liberality. Besides the great advantage which they bring to society, they have the pleasing effect of awakening all the virtuous sensibilities of the heart, both in those who confer, and in those who receive them. They are often felt with warmer relish by a family in distress, and productive of more tender gratitude, than could have been raised

by any other mode of beneficence. This is rendered sensible to every heart by that beautiful expression of the Divine compassion in the text; *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*

By the train of sentiment we have pursued, your thoughts, my brethren, will now be naturally led to the consideration of that institution which has given occasion to the meeting of this day; *The Society formed for the benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the Established Church of Scotland.*

In entering on this part of the subject, I trust that I may be permitted to say a few words concerning that order of men, in behalf of whose descendants the favour of the public is now requested. Though belonging myself to that order, yet as my advanced age and long experience may reasonably be supposed to have corrected the prejudices and cooled the ardour of partiality, some weight, I hope, will be allowed to my testimony; when now, in the fifty-fourth year of my ministry, after having seen successions of ministers, in various parts of the country, rise and fall, and after long acquaintance with many of divided sentiments, among my brethren, I can with confidence declare it as my opinion, that there exists not any where a more respectable and useful class of men than the Clergy of the Church of Scotland. Among such a numerous body, I readily admit that some exceptions will be found to the character which I now give of them. Considering human frailty, this is no more than was naturally to be expected. But, taking the ministers of this church in general, I can venture to assert that they are a

well-informed and enlightened set of men; decent and irreproachable in their behaviour, conscientious in the discharge of their pastoral duties, and very generally esteemed by the people under their care. There was a time, when the Presbyterian clergy lay under the imputation of being sour in their tempers, narrow in their opinions, severe and intolerant in their principles. But as, together with the diffusion of knowledge, a more liberal spirit has pervaded the clerical order in this part of Britain, it will be found that their manners now are conciliating; that they study to promote harmony and good order in their parishes; that they have shown themselves addicted to useful literature, and in several branches of it have eminently distinguished themselves; and that while they are edifying and consolatory to the lowest, they have acquired just respect from the higher classes of men.

As long, therefore, as this country shall be preserved from the contagion of that false philosophy, which, by overthrowing all religious establishments, has engendered so much impiety, and wrought so much mischief, in a neighbouring land; as long as the existence of Christian faith, and of religious principles, shall be considered as essential to the welfare of a nation, it may reasonably, I think, be expected, that such a body of men as I have mentioned shall be held entitled to the regard and good-will of their fellow-citizens and countrymen.

Circumstances there are, which give particular occasion for this regard and good-will to be called forth. You all know the nature of that provision which is made by the public for the established clergy of this country. It is such as is suited to that sober

and frugal manner of living which is expected from ministers of the Gospel. Though in consideration of the growing prosperity of the country, and of its natural consequence, the increased rate of every expense, it has been found reasonable that, of late years, some addition should be made to the provision of many of the ministers, yet still their condition approaches not to what can be termed opulence in any degree. It is such as to raise them above contempt; such as to afford a decent subsistence for themselves and their families; but such as seldom or never can enable them, without some other sources of revenue, to make provision for their children when going forth into the world, especially if their family be numerous.

It was the consideration of this circumstance that lately gave rise to the Society in favour of the Sons of the Clergy. Many a minister, who, for a tract of years, has faithfully laboured in the discharge of every duty to his flock, has felt, towards the close of his days, what a blessing it would have proved to him, if such a society had existed in his time, to which he could have looked for aid. —— Represent to yourselves, my friends, one of this character, — and the representation which I am now to give is not the work of fancy, but founded upon what often in fact takes place. —— Figure, I say, a worthy Clergyman, now in the decline of life, foreseeing the end of his labours drawing near, surrounded with a family of children, to whom his chief care had been devoted, and in whom his heart had long been bound up. Their education, from their earliest years, he had conducted, or at least superintended himself, with paternal fondness. Whatever his scanty stores could afford,

he had cheerfully expended, in giving all the advantage to their education which his own village or which the nearest county-town could yield. He had made every preparation that was in his power to make, for their acting a proper part in future life. But the time of preparation is finished. The gay season of childhood is over. The period is arrived when they must go forth; must leave that paternal mansion where, in the midst of their youthful companions, they had spent many happy days; must go to provide for themselves, the best they can, in a world, which to them is unknown. And whither are they to go? —— Of the few friends their father ever had, some are now gone down to the dust. Others, with whom he once lived in familiar intimacy, lifted up now with the pride of opulence, have forgotten him and his family. One of his sons, at least, he fondly wished to have educated for that profession to which he himself had been so long attached. But, living at a distance from any of the seats of learning, and having no protector to whose assistance he could look, he feels with regret that he is unable for the attempt. Some of his children he must send away to seek their fortune in a distant land. Others must be consigned to the dangers of the ocean, or be reduced to gain their bread by following some of the mean and laborious occupations of life. Viewing the dark and discouraging prospect that is before them, the father's heart is sore, when he bids adieu to his children. With tears in his eyes, he gives them his blessing as they depart. Little more it is in his power to give them? but he commits them to the protection of their father's God. — How happy, if in these mournful moments, a voice of such a nature as this could

reach his ears; *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*

ANIMATED by the desire of imitating that spirit of Divine compassion which breathes in these words, a few respectable gentlemen in this city formed, six years ago, the plan of a Society for assisting the Sons of the Clergy. The institution, as soon as it was known, met with public approbation and favour. It was early distinguished, and amply assisted by Royal munificence. It was incorporated by Royal charter; and, through the generosity of the public, has prospered so far, that the Society has already been enabled to give aid to a considerable number of the Sons of Clergymen of this Church. The aid which the Society, in an infant state, could as yet give, has been small; as it is confined to what the interest of their capital allows them to bestow. They earnestly wish to become more effectually useful, by enlarging their provision for the education of Sons; and hope to be enabled, in due time, to give assistance to the Daughters, as well as to the Sons, of ministers; so as to afford comfort to a widowed mother, and to the whole of a disconsolate family. For it is to be observed, that it is not merely to a literary education, or to preparations for the church, that the intentions of the Society are directed. They mean so to apply their beneficence, that the families of ministers may be assisted to acquire the necessary qualifications for pursuing any useful employment in the world, for which they appear to be most fitted.

Among other inducements which may encourage the public to promote this beneficent plan, there is one which I cannot, on this occasion, omit to mention;

that is, the signal success with which many Sons of Scots Clergymen have been blessed, in filling with honour several of the important departments of society. As I have not myself the honour of belonging to that class, I can speak with more freedom on this topic than some other of my brethren. Not to mention the well-known and distinguished names of several who at present possess, with much dignity, stations in the church, and chairs in the universities, and some now gone, who will be long remembered, as having done no small honour by their literary productions, to this part of the island; let me desire you to look round on the most respectable stations of busy life, and to consider how many of those who now make a high figure at the bar, some on the bench, many in the commercial, the military, and the naval professions, were born and bred under the humble roof of a minister. —— Nor is this success to be ascribed to any favourable coincidence of circumstances at this time more than any other. It is the natural result of the manner in which they were brought up. Educated in good principles, and formed to sober manners, by pious and virtuous parents, they enter on the world less tainted than others by fashionable vices and follies. By the situation of their parents they were inured, from their earliest youth, to temperance and habits of application. They come forward, not altogether ignorant and unlettered, like the children of the meaner classes of men, but with the foundations of good education and useful knowledge. At the same time, they see and know that it is not to fortune and to friends, but to their own industry and exertions, they must trust for future success; and that only accord-

ing to the opinion entertained of their merit, they can hope to be patronized by others. Hence it comes to pass that young persons of this description often advance themselves more quickly, and act their part more successfully, than others who, from their birth and fortune, have enjoyed the benefits of a more improved and ornamented education; but whose opulence sometimes supersedes labour, encourages indolence, and perhaps fosters dissipation and love of pleasure.

These are considerations which tend to bespeak public favour in behalf of the institution which I now recommend. Consider, my friends, that by befriending and assisting it, you contribute to bring forward a new race, who, like those of the same rank that have gone before them, may come, in their day, to be beneficial to their country and to the world. It must not be forgotten, that assistance to bring them forward becomes now more necessary than it was to the former race, in consequence of the great additional expense which is well known now to attend every part of education. By seasonable generosity, on this occasion, you may be ripening in secret the seeds of future genius; you may be bringing forward to maturity those young plants which shall flourish hereafter in the land; and which may perhaps attain such strength, and rise to such a height, as to protect others under their shade.

To the honour of the present age, it must be acknowledged not to be deficient in a spirit of humanity. Frequent instances both of public and private beneficence come forth on every proper occasion. In this city, many a noble monument

appears of charitable foundations and institutions; some destined to educate the children of the needy; others to furnish maintenance for the poor, to provide for the aged, or to receive and relieve the sick and the distressed. By their means much timely succour is given, and many a distress is mitigated. The institution for the sake of which we are now assembled, partaking of the same benevolent spirit with the others, reaches to a more respectable class of men, and aims at a more extensive object. Its purpose is, to prevent those evils which would arise to the public, from the children of worthy parents being left to languish in that hopeless indigence which throws them first as a burden on society, and may afterwards render them a dangerous nuisance to it. Instead of this, it aims at bringing them into such a state as affords a reasonable prospect of their proving useful members of the community, and perhaps of their ranking among its ornaments and supports.

So good a design Providence has already begun to favour, and we hope will continue to bless. After we are laid in the dust, the generation that succeeds us may experience its happy effects. They who now contribute by their generosity to carry it forward, will, in the mean time, enjoy the satisfaction of having adopted the benevolent spirit of the Christian religion; they will enjoy the satisfaction of having imitated, as they could, that compassion of our heavenly Father, which, in so affecting a manner, is expressed by the words of the text; words which I hope will continue to dwell, with a lasting and tender impression, on all our hearts; *Leave your fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in me.*

SERMON LXXII.

On Hopes and Disappointments.

PROVERBS, x. 28.

The hope of the Righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the Wicked shall perish.

ATTACHMENT to futurity has a remarkable influence on the operations of the human mind. The present, whatever it be, seldom engages our attention so much as what is to come. Remembrance of the past may sometimes occupy our thoughts; but what for the most part fills them, is the anticipation of the future. The present is apt to be considered as an evanescent scene, just about to pass away; and in the midst of wishes and desires, of hopes and fears, which all respect futurity, we may be said to dwell. As on these the life of man is so much suspended, it becomes a very material part both of wisdom and of duty to attend to any regulations by which they may be properly conducted. For if expectations and hopes on one hand, and fears and alarms on the other, are suffered to arise with groundless precipitancy, and to acquire an undue ascendant, it is evident that they will produce much delusion in conduct, and often will engender much vice and guilt. As there is a *hope of the Righteous which shall be gladness*, so there is *an expectation of the Wicked which shall perish.* The anticipations of the former, con-

ducted by prudence, and regulated by piety, mislead him not from his duty, and afford him satisfaction in the end. While the expectations of the latter, arising from fantastic imaginary prospects, delude him for a while with vanity, and terminate in misery. It will therefore be an useful subject of meditation, to consider, in a few instances, of what we may, and of what we may not, reasonably expect from the world, when we look forward to what is most likely to happen in the ordinary course of human affairs.

I. We are not to expect the uninterrupted continuance of any measure of health, prosperity, or comfort, which we now enjoy. There is the greater reason for beginning with this admonition, as there is a strong propensity in human nature to imagine that what we at present possess, is always to remain. When no warnings of any approaching change appear, we are all inclined to look forward to futurity with a smile; and to indulge the hope that *to-morrow shall be as this day*, and even *more abundantly*. Hence, in the lives of thoughtless men, there breaks forth so much folly and presumption, so much pride and levity, and often so much impiety and contempt of religion. *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? Or what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him? Our mountain stands strong; and shall never be moved.*

On the lot of some men Providence is pleased to bestow a longer continuance of prosperity than on that of others. But as the term of that continuance is hidden from us, all flattering and confident expectations are without foundation. At one period or another, it is certain that the calm is to be troubled,

and the dark cloud is to arise; and how soon that period is to come, you cannot tell. In your health, or your fortune, or among your connections and friends, be assured that some trial awaits you. For human life never stands still for any long time. It is by no means a fixed and steady object, like the mountain or the rock which you always find in the same situation; it is a river continually moving and flowing. Neither is it the still and smooth stream which glides along with the same constant tenor; but a river which for a time may hold a regular course within its banks, till, being interrupted by rocks, it foams into a torrent, or, swoln by foreign currents, it lays waste the neighbouring plains. Amidst such vicissitudes of time and life, who has any title to reckon upon the future? — To faults, all are subject; to troubles, all are exposed. As that man is the most virtuous who can be charged with the fewest faults, so that life is the happiest which suffers the fewest troubles. To look for entire exemption from them, is to court disappointment.

At the same time, I do not mean to hold it forth as any precept of religion or wisdom, that we ought always to sadden the present hour by dwelling on the thoughts of future disappointment. What is given us, let us cheerfully enjoy, and render thanks to Him who bestows it. Virtue, conjoined with prudence, may reasonably afford the prospect of good days to come; *for God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.** Such a prospect therefore he may innocently indulge, if he preserve always that temperance and moderation, that

* Eccles. ii. 26.

modesty and humility, which become one who knows that his state is ever in hazard of changing. But I mean to warn those, who, giving way to the elation of giddy hopes, lose the command of themselves, that by this intoxication of mind they are preparing the way for an alteration of state; they are pushing forward the wheels of advancing change; they are accelerating their own downfall. To them belongs that admonition of the wise man, would they seriously listen to it; *If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many: all that cometh is vanity.**

II. We are not to expect, from our intercourse with others, all that satisfaction which we fondly wish. What the individual either enjoys or suffers by himself, exhibits only an imperfect view of his condition. In the present state of human affairs, we are all so closely interwoven with one another, that a very material part of our happiness or misery arises from the connections which we have with those who are around us, and the relations in which we stand to them. These, therefore, open a field within which our wishes and expectationss find an ample range. One of the first objects of wish to every one is to maintain a proper place and rank in society; not to fall behind his equals; but rather, if he can, to surpass them, so as to command consideration and respect from his neighbours. This, among the vain and ambitious, is always the favourite aim. With them it arises to immoderate expectations, founded

* Eccles. xi. 8.

on their supposed talents and imagined merits. But perhaps, in the hearts of all men, some wish of this nature lurks; some wish not to be overlooked in the crowd, but to attain that degree of distinction which they conceive they might reasonably claim.

With respect to claims of this sort it is to be apprehended that, among persons of all characters and descriptions, many an *expectation must perish*, and many a disappointment be endured. For such is the power which the sophistry of self-love exercises over us, that almost every one may be assured that he measures himself by a deceitful scale; that he places the point of his own merit at a higher degree than others will admit that it reaches. All are jealous of the high pretensions of others. He who suspects a rival in his neighbour, will study every method of bringing him down to what he takes to be his proper level; nay, often of depreciating him below it. Hence the endless mortifications which the vain and self-conceited suffer. Hence the spleen and resentment which is so often breaking forth, disturbing the peace of society, and involving it in crimes and miseries. Were expectations more moderate, they would be more favourably received. Did we more rarely attempt to push ourselves into notice, the world would more readily allow us, nay, sometimes assist us, to come forward. Were we content sometimes to remain in the shade, we would with more advantage come forth into sunshine, and find the brightness interrupted by fewer clouds.

In the closer connections which men form of intimate friendship and domestic life, there is still more reason for due moderation in our expectations and hopes. For the nearer that men approach to each other, the more

numerous the points of contact are in which they touch, the greater indeed will be the pleasure of perfect symphony and agreements of feelings; but, at the same time, if any harsh and repulsive sensations take place, the more grating and pungent will be the pain. — If you look for a friend or a partner of your life, in whose temper there is not to be found the least inequality, who upon no occasion is to be hurt or offended by any frailties you discover, whose feelings are to harmonise in every trifle with yours, whose countenance is always to reflect the image of your own, you look for a pleasing phantom, which is never, or, at most, very rarely, to be found; and if disappointment sour your mind, you have your own folly to blame. You ought to have considered that you live in a region of human infirmity, where every one has imperfections and failings. You assuredly have your own. What reason had you to imagine, that the person whom you love and esteem was to be the only exception from the common fate? Here, if any where, it becomes you to overlook and forbear; and never to allow small failings to dwell on your attention so much as to deface the whole of an amiable character. From trifling misunderstandings arising from the most frivolous causes, springs much of the misery of social and domestic life. Hence is blasted many a pleasing blossom of hope; and many an *expectation*, which once promised unbroken harmony, is left to *perish*. I shall only mention,

III. Another instance of what we are not to expect in the ordinary course of human affairs; that is, constant gratitude from those whom we have most obliged and served. — I am far from saying that

gratitude is an unknown, or even a rare virtue among mankind; I think not so ill of human nature. On the contrary, it is my belief, that grateful sensations for favours received are very generally felt; and when no strong passion counteracts those sensations, that grateful returns are generally intended, and often are actually made. But then, our expectations of proper returns must be kept within moderate bounds. We must not carry them so far as to imagine, that gratitude is to produce unlimited compliance with every desire which we choose to indulge; or that they whom we have obliged will altogether desert their own interest for the sake of their benefactors. Many circumstances, it is to be remembered, tend to cool the grateful emotion. Time always deadens the memory of benefits. Sometimes they are considered as having being fully recompensed, and the debt of gratitude repaid. As benefits conferred, are often under-rated by those who receive them, so they are sometimes over-valued by those who confer them. On persons of light and careless minds, no moral sentiment makes any deep impression; with such, the remembrance of both benefit and benefactor is apt to pass speedily away. With the proud spirit, which claims every thing as its due, gratitude is in a great measure incompatible. From persons of this character, we are never to expect it; and indeed from persons of any character, we are not to be surprised, if, in the present state of the world, it rises not so high as we thought we had reason to hope.

Having thus shown in some material instances, what we have no reason to expect in the ordinary course of human affairs, I turn next to the brighter side of

the subject, and shall show what a wise and good man may reasonably expect from human life. *His hope shall be gladness*, though *the expectation of fools shall perish.*

I. WHATEVER course the affairs of the world take, he may justly hope to enjoy peace of mind. I am sensible that by the sceptic and the profligate, this will be held as a very inconsiderable object of expectation or hope. To them every enjoyment which is of mental and intellectual nature appears of small value. Give them affluent fortune and flourishing health, and they account themselves sure of felicity. But to these very persons I appeal, whether there have not been many occasions, when the want of a peaceful and self-approving mind has not blasted all the enjoyments they possessed? In the midst of the pomps and luxuries of life, have they never experienced the pangs of a *wounded spirit?* Have they never felt what it was to be tormented by the sense of past follies, and to be stung with the reproaches of an angry conscience? Dare they say, that in the midst of those feelings they were happy? Will they not be constrained to own, that in such moments of inward pain, they would willingly have exchanged conditions with an innocent peasant? Let them then learn the value of that object of hope which they affect to contemn, by recollecting what they have suffered from the want of it. — Assuredly, the peace of an approving conscience is one of the chief ingredients of human happiness; one of the most grateful of all sensations to the heart of man: provided always that this self-approbation rest upon proper

grounds; that it be tempered with due humility, and regulated by Christian faith; that it never swell into an arrogant opinion of our virtue, or into confidence in our own merits, as if they were sufficient, without any higher intervention, to render us acceptable to God.

He, whose study it is to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and man, who upon just principles can be satisfied that he is walking in the path which was appointed by God, will have, in every state of fortune, a ground of hope which may justly be denominated *gladness*; for peace of mind will not forsake him. Let the world vibrate around him as it will, and repeat all its vicissitudes, he will not be shaken by them. He has always somewhat to rest upon for comfort. Wrapped up in his own integrity, he remains sound and entire within himself; and with a firm mind awaits the coming storm. *He is not afraid of evil tidings; for his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.** As he can look up to a Supreme Power with good hope, so he can look every man in the face without uneasiness, when he is conscious that no man can reproach him with having entrenched upon his neighbour's rights, or having causelessl provoked and attacked him. Hence, a calm min by day, and undisturbed slumbers by night. Hence, the hope of that cont nued protection of Heaven which watches over the righteous. *In the time of trouble He shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me upon a rock.* † Besides this expectation of internal peace,

* Psalm cxii. 7. † Psalm xxvii. 5.

II. A GOOD man has ground to expect that any external condition into which, in the course of human affairs, he may pass, shall, by means of virtue and wisdom, be rendered, if not perfectly agreeable, yet tolerably easy to him. That distresses of various kinds are scattered through the life of every mortal man, there can be no doubt. But it is also to be remembered, that to many distresses there are remedies which it is in our power to apply; and that with all sorrows some comforts are mixed. So many loud complaints we hear of the inequalities of fortune in the world, that one would imagine the rich and the great to be the only persons who had the privilege of being happy; and that the mean and the poor were doomed, without exception, to be miserable. Be assured, my friends, that the inequality of real happiness is not to be measured by the inequality of outward estate. When you see the peasant cheerful in his cottage, and the labourer singing in the fields, you may discern that there is some power in the mind superior to external condition; that more depends on the man himself, than on the situation in which the world has placed him. Would you estimate justly the sum of happiness that he enjoys, or the degree of unhappiness that he feels? The questions you are to put, if the man be in prosperity, are not, How much wealth does such a man possess? but, How does he enjoy it? If he be in adversity, not, What is his distress? but, How does he bear it?

Hence arises the hope to a wise and good man of either finding, or making his state tolerable to himself. If he be not wanting to himself, he is never left without resources to assist those exertions which he makes in his own behalf. Roses indeed are not

always strewed in his path; but from fields that are seemingly waste, flowers may be gathered by those who look carefully around them. Seldom or never do all good things forsake, and all evils beset a man at once. In some corner of our lot there are always comforts that may be found, if we be not so foolish as to overlook them. Even in the intervals of sickness and pain, satisfactions may be enjoyed. Returns of relief are often felt with a more lively sensation of pleasure, than what we taste in unbroken health. It has been often observed, that what is very severe of any kind, seldom lasts long; and the uneasiness which lasts, we become accustomed to bear. Time and continuance reconcile us gradually to many things that were at first believed to be unsupportable. Providence has in mercy provided this gentle opiate to assuage various sorrows of human life. What we behold others around us bearing, we learn to think may also be borne by us. *The spirit of man will long sustain his infirmities.* From the treasures of his own mind in reflection and meditation, much relief will arise to the virtuous; and at the bottom of the most disconsolate estate, there lies always a secret hope that better days may come. — From such circumstances as these, the expectation of passing through life with some measure of comfort, may reasonably be entertained by such as are not wanting to themselves in propriety of conduct. In looking forward to futurity, the prospect we are to take of the world is not that which is sometimes gloomily indulged, of a forlorn region, where nothing is to be beheld but dreary and inhospitable wastes, and no objects are to be met with but serpents that hiss, and wild beasts that devour. The prospect is rather that of a mixed

region, where indeed rugged rocks are seen, and desarts extend, over which the tempest sometimes scowls; but where also many peaceful habitations and fruitful fields occur to refresh the sight. Once more,

III. We have ground to expect from the ordinary course of human affairs, that if we persevere in studying to do our duty towards God and man, we shall meet with the esteem, the love, and confidence of those who are around us. I before observed, that in our expectations of receiving what we think due respect and consideration from the world, we shall be often disappointed. But that observation was applied to the claims we make on others, on account of talents, abilities, and superior merits. To such claims the world is seldom disposed to give a favourable reception. We live amidst rivals and competitors, whose self-estimation prompts them to depreciate us, and of course subjects us to many a mortification. The case is different with respect to moral qualifications. There the world is more ready to do justice to character. No man is hurt, at least few are so, by hearing his neighbour esteemed a worthy and honourable man. This praise will be bestowed, without grudging, by many who value themselves on the possession of qualities, which they conceive to be of superior importance in the judgment of the world.

But whatever they may think, it is certain that the basis of all lasting reputation is laid in moral worth. Great parts and endowments may sparkle for a while in the public eye. The world looks up to them with wonder, as to an extraordinary comet or a blazing

star. Distinguished virtue and worth create less astonishment; but, like the fixed luminaries of heaven, they shine with more steady and permanent lustre. Unaffected piety conjoined with inviolable uprightness and integrity in conduct, command a degree of respect which approaches to veneration. Candour and fairness never fail to attract esteem and trust. Kindness and benevolence conciliate love and create warm friendship. — The best character may indeed for a time be accidentally obscured and misunderstood. But the world commonly judges soundly in the end. After a man has acted his part for a while among his fellows, he is known upon trial to be what he is; and if his worth be real and genuine, *his righteousness comes forth as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day.*

This is what a good man has always ground to look for, even in evil times; and surely, there are few things which he can more desire, than the prospect of being valued and esteemed by those among whom he lives. This counterbalances many a disadvantage of outward fortune, and puts into his hand many opportunities of satisfaction and comfort. He is likely to possess many friends and well-wishers, and to have few enemies. The more he is known, the more will the favour of those who surround him grow; and the prospect is before him of having his *hoary head crowned with honour.*

THUS, in several instances, I have briefly pointed out what may, or may not, be expected from the world, when we look forward to the ordinary course of human affairs: Not an uninterrupted enjoyment of all the comforts of prosperity; not undisturbed

satisfaction in our various intercourses with society; not grateful returns from all whom we have obliged or served: But what we may expect, if we keep a good conscience and study to do our duty, is peace of mind; a tolerably easy and comfortable state, amidst the vicissitudes of life; and the love and esteem of those with whom we are connected.—*The hope of the righteous shall be gladness.*

THE present subject has led me to consider only what the righteous man has to hope for in the ordinary course of the world. But I have now to observe, that he has before him a much higher object of hope than any which I have yet mentioned; a hope which arises not from the ordinary course of human affairs, but from an extraordinary interposition of Divine grace and mercy conveyed to us by the Gospel; even the *hope which is laid up for him in heaven;* the assured expectation of a better life, in a higher and better world. Put the case of the servant of God being overwhelmed with all the disappointments which the world can bring upon him, here is an *expectation* which will be always *gladness;* with which he can perpetually solace himself. Through the present state of existence he is no more than a passenger. If he can render it in any degree tolerable and easy to himself, it is well; it is all that he expects. His home, his place of rest, is in those habitations to which, through the merits of his Redeemer, he is taught and encouraged to aspire. He knows that *in due season he shall reap, if he faint not.** That when the *earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, he*

* Gal. vi. 9.

shall have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens * ; for *to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will render eternal life.*† Hence, whether you consider him in this life, or consider him as looking forward to another, his hope is perpetual *gladness, while the expectations of the wicked shall perish.*

* 2 Cor. v. 1. † Rom. ii. 7.

SERMON LXXIII.

On the proper Disposition of the Heart towards God.

Acts, xvii. 28.

In Him we live, and move, and have our Being.

THERE is nothing which all nature more loudly proclaims, than that some Supreme Being has framed and rules this universe. *Day uttereth speech of it to-day, and night showeth knowledge of it to-night.* Our birth and our life, our sensations and our actions, the objects which we behold, and the pleasures which we enjoy, all conspire to testify that some wonderful intelligence has disposed and arranged, and still supports and animates, the whole frame of nature. This is what scarcely any man of sober mind ever called in question. It was the dictate of nature to the most savage and barbarous, as well as to the most civilized nations. The American and the Indian in his desart, as well as the Grecian sage and the Roman conqueror, adored, each after his own mode, a Sovereign of the Universe. — The Psalmist observes, that *the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.** Among the follies, however, with which the human race is chargeable, this is one which, in the course of ages, seemed to have made the smallest progress. It

* Psalm xiv. 1.

was reserved for modern times and evil days, to engender in one region of the earth, a system of false philosophy, which should revive the exploded principles of atheism, and study to pour forth their poison among the nations, not only to the extinction of religion, but to the subversion of established governments, and of good order among mankind.

Dismissing all delusions of this nature as unworthy the attention of any reasonable unperverted mind; holding it for certain that nothing can be more real than the existence of a Supreme Divinity, it follows of course from this belief, that there are dispositions correspondent to Him which ought to be found in every human mind, among the young and the old, among the high and the low, the rich and the poor. It is absurd to suppose, that while the relations in which we stand to our fellow-creatures, whether as equals, superiors, or inferiors, naturally call forth certain sentiments and affections, there should be none which properly correspond to the first and greatest of all Beings; to Him, whom, though we see him not, we all recognize; to Him *in whom*, as it is beautifully expressed in my text, *we live, and move, and have our being.*

THE proper disposition of mind with respect to God, is generally expressed by the term of Love to him. This is very justly founded on the solemn injunction of our blessed Lord.* *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment.* Hence, it is common among religious

* Matt. xxii. 37.

writers to include the whole of pious affections towards God in Love. But when this term is applied to the Almighty, we must be careful to understand aright what it imports. We all know what it is to love any of our fellow-creatures; but such an affection as we bear to them, cannot in a literal sense be transferred to God. Among them it is sometimes connected with the fervency of passion, it commonly imports some similarity of nature, and some degree of fond and intimate attachment; all which it were highly improper in us to affect towards the Supreme Being, *whose ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts.* I am afraid that the application of Love in a strict sense, and sometimes in too fervent and passionate a strain towards God, has, among some serious and well-disposed minds, given rise to no little enthusiasm in religion.

When therefore we treat of Love as applied to God, it must be analysed or resolved into those sentiments which are proper and suitable for us to encourage towards the God whom we adore. That Love of him which religion requires, and which our Saviour has so solemnly enjoined, is a compounded affection, and the dispositions which it includes are principally three; reverence, gratitude, submission. Of the nature and foundation of each of these I am to treat in the sequel of this Discourse, and shall endeavour to illustrate them as forming that temper and disposition of mind, which we ought always to preserve towards the Great Author of our existence.

I. The foundation of every proper disposition towards God must be laid in Reverence, that is, admiration mixed with awe; what, in its lower

degrees among men, is called Respect; but carried to its highest point with relation to God, may be termed profound Veneration. In this disposition towards Him we ought habitually to be found not only in the exercises of immediate devotion, but amidst the ordinary occurrences of life. Every thing indeed that we see around us gives perpetual occasion for it. We find ourselves in an immense universe, where it is impossible for us, without astonishment and awe, to contemplate the glory and the power of Him who hath created it. From the greatest to the least object that we behold, from the star that glitters in the heavens to the insect that creeps upon the ground, from the thunder that rolls in the skies to the flower that blossoms in the fields, all things testify a profound and mysterious wisdom, a mighty and all-powerful hand, before which we must tremble and adore. Neither the causes nor the issues of the events which we behold, is it in our power to trace; neither how we came into this world, nor whither we go when we retire from it, are we able of ourselves to tell; but in the mean time find ourselves surrounded with astonishing magnificence on every hand. We walk through the earth, as through the apartments of a vast palace, which fill every attentive spectator with wonder. All the works which our power can erect, all the ornaments which our art can contrive, are feeble and trifling in comparison with those glories which nature every where presents to our view. The immense arch of the heavens, the splendour of the sun in his meridian brightness, or the beauty of his rising and setting hours, the rich landscape of the fields, and the boundless expanse of the ocean, are scenes which mock every rival attempt of human

skill or labour. Nor is it only in the splendid appearances of nature, but amidst its rudest forms, that we trace the hand of the Divinity. In the solitary desart, and the high mountain, in the hanging precipice, the roaring torrent, and the aged forest, though there be nothing to cheer, there is much to strike the mind with awe, to give rise to those solemn and sublime sensations which elevate the heart to an Almighty, All-creating Power.

In short, we can no where cast our eyes around us without meeting what is sufficient to awaken reverence of the Deity. This reverence becomes the more profound, that the Great Being who is the object of it, is to us invisible and unknown. We may seek to discover him, but he hides himself from us; his footsteps we clearly trace, but his face we can never behold. *We go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him.** We know that *he is not far from every one of us;* yet he shrouds himself in the darkness of his pavilion; he *answereth from the secret place of thunder.*† Before this incomprehensible Being, this God terrible and strong, we become in a manner annihilated; we are sensible that in his sight we are only as the *drop of the bucket,* and the *small dust in the balance;* and in his presence can only *rejoice with trembling.* For we know that the mighty arm which upholds the universe, and which surrounds us with wonders on every side, can in a moment crush us to the dust, if we become objects of displeasure to heaven. Awful

* Job, xxiii. 8, 9. † Ps. lxxxi. 7.

are the operations of the Divine Power which we are constantly beholding in the moral as well as in the natural world. The Almighty rules among the nations, as well as over individuals: on his pleasure depend all the great revolutions of the earth; the interpositions of his Providence are frequently apparent to the world, in bringing down the mighty, and raising up the fallen. In the books of the Law and the Prophets, we hear his threatenings against rebellious sinners denounced with a tremendous voice; and in the dispensation of the Gospel, a most striking instance is exhibited to us of the strict justice of his government, in the expiation that was required for the apostacy of a guilty world. So that both the Law and the Gospel, the works of nature and the conduct of Providence unite in uttering that solemn voice which ought often to resound in our ears: *Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth. Fear before him all ye nations: Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. For honour and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. He alone doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.**

On this head of discourse I have insisted the more, because I apprehend that such sentiments as I have now been inculcating occur too rarely among many professed Christians. Did an awful reverence for the Supreme Being dwell on all our minds with a properly impressive sense, its effects would oftener appear in conduct. On many occasions, it would check a wanton levity of spirits. It would infuse

* Ps. xlvi. 10. Ps. xcvi. 6—8. Job, v. 9.

more solemnity into our religious acts. It would inspire greater respect for the temples of God, and for all the forms of sacred worship. It would banish that profanation of the name of God, which we so often hear from unhallowed lips. — Let it be remembered, that the *fear of God* is, throughout much of the Scripture, employed as the term descriptive of the whole of religion. It is not the fear which slaves are constrained to feel for a tyrant, but the reverence which children have for the best parent, or subjects for the best sovereign; the veneration which necessarily enters into the love we bear to a Being of a superior order; it is to *fear the Lord and his goodness*, as it is emphatically expressed by one of the Prophets.* This fear of God, therefore, is not only consistent with the love of Him, but forms a material part of it. The pretended love of God disjoined from reverence of Him, would no longer be genuine love, but would rise into arrogant presumption. I proceed to observe,

II. That gratitude forms an essential part of that disposition which we ought to bear towards God. This implies an affectionate sense of God upon the mind, and enters directly into love, understood in its most common acceptation. It were a gross mistake to imagine, that the reverence of which I have discoursed has any tendency to check gratitude: on the contrary, it heightens it, by uniting the sense of our Benefactor's condescension with the benefits which He conveys. The more eminent the qualities of a benefactor are, and the higher the rank is in

* Hosea, iii. 5.

which he stands, our hearts are warmed the more by the feeling of his goodness.

It is impossible to think of God at all, without conceiving Him as the Benefactor of mankind. Mysterious as this world is in many of its appearances, it nevertheless carries, on the whole, a strongly marked character of goodness and benignity in its Author. We behold a vast system obviously contrived to provide, not food and nourishment only, but comfort also and enjoyment to an infinite number of inhabitants. The more that philosophy has enlarged our views of nature, the more it has been discovered that, throughout the wide extent of creation, there is no useless profusion of magnificence, but that every thing has been rendered subservient to the welfare of the rational or sensible world; nay, that many objects, which were once considered as not only superfluous but noxious, hold an useful place in the general system. Such provision has been made for our entertainment on this earth, such care has been taken to store the world with a variety of pleasures, to cheer our senses, and enliven our imagination, that he whose eye opens on all the beauty of nature, must be of insensible heart indeed, if he feels no gratitude to that Being who has brought him forth to enjoy this wonderful scene.

But the gratitude of a good man will naturally go farther than this. He will think not only of the benefits which he enjoys in common with the rest of his fellow-creatures, but of those which are appropriated particularly to himself.—Who is there amongst us, my brethren, but in fairly reviewing the events of his life from infancy to this day, in thinking of the comforts he enjoys, and recollecting the dangers from which he has been delivered; who is

there, I say, that has not cause to acknowledge an invisible Guardian, who has all along watched over his frail estate, has protected and blessed him? — Perhaps of the blessings which you enjoy, or the deliverances you have received, you are more disposed to trace some human cause; one favourable distinction you ascribe to your birth, your parents, or your education; for some other happy circumstance you think yourself solely indebted to the kindness of an earthly friend, or you refer it to the exertions of your own dexterity and talents. — Thoughtless and inconsiderate man! Have you forgotten that there is a First Cause of all, a Supreme Lord, who, from the beginning, has arranged and prepared the whole series of causes and effects, of whose destination and agency men are no more than the secondary instruments? To what but to the original plan of his goodness, do you owe the favourable circumstances of your birth or your education, the kindness which He ordained to spring up in the breast of your friend, or the talents and abilities which He implanted within you, in order to favour your success?

But an exhortation to gratitude, you perhaps consider as coming unseasonably in your present situation. The time was, when the light of the Divine countenance shone upon you, and, looking up to a Benefactor in heaven, with a grateful heart you acknowledged your blessings to be derived from Him; but that time is now past; you are left desolate and forsaken, bereaved of the chief comforts on which you had set your hearts. — And, because many of the favours of Heaven are past, ought they to be gone from your remembrance? Are there not still some others remaining, for which you have rea-

son to give thanks? Have you forgotten all the blessings you have continued to enjoy ever since the day that you came forth a helpless infant into the world? Be assured that a gratitude of that sort, which dies away as soon as it ceases to be fed by the usual stream of benefits, which has regard to present favours only, and none to those that are past, is not true gratitude, but the symptom of a selfish and mercenary spirit. If you be disposed to thank God only when he is giving you all the desires of your hearts, what praise have ye? Do not publicans and sinners the same? Men who have little either of religion or sensibility of heart. But when Providence shrouds itself in a dark cloud, and some of your favourite enjoyments are carried away, if still with calm and patient mind, you continue to bless the name of the Lord, and still retain a thankful sense of the blessings you have so long, and so far beyond your deserts, been permitted to enjoy; this is to be truly grateful; this is to show yourselves the dutiful children of a Father in Heaven.

In reviewing the grounds which we have for gratitude to God, it becomes us to attend, not only to those blessings which appertain individually to each of us, but to those also which we enjoy in common with others of our brethren. How much reason have we, for instance, to bless God for having cast our lot in a land where we enjoy all the advantages of mild and equal government, and all the comforts of tranquillity and peace, while many a nation around us is oppressed by the hand of tyrannical power, disturbed with the alarms and terrours of war, or suffering from the ravages of the hostile spoiler? What higher reason still to be grateful for having

our lot cast where the joyful sound of the Gospel is heard, where the glad tidings *of peace upon earth, and good-will to the sons of men*, are announced to us by the Son of God, who came to bring pardon and salvation to a guilty world? What everlasting ground of thankfulness is afforded by the blessed hope that is given us of life immortal; of *a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved; of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, ascertained to all good men by the death and the resurrection of our blessed Redeemer! *Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies.** Let us now add,

III. Entire and profound submission, as a disposition most necessary to be preserved on our part towards God. This includes submission of the understanding to the discoveries which God has been pleased to make; submission of the inclinations to the laws which He has promulgated for our conduct; submission of the will to the dispensations of his Providence, as they affect the events of our life. It is not submission constrained merely by a power against which we know that it is in vain to struggle; it is submission arising from reverence compounded with gratitude; submission to One whose supreme perfection entitles Him to absolute obedience, whose experienced goodness affords ground for implicit trust.

* Psalm ciii. 1, 2, 3.

In the present imperfect state of human nature, there will be often found no small reluctance to that entire resignation to God which religion requires. The pride of human understanding will sometimes revolt against the discoveries which God has made in his word, as deficient and unsatisfactory; the struggles of passion will frequently rise against the restraints imposed on us by his laws, and the severities inflicted by his Providence. But in the heart of a pious man all such opposition is checked and borne down, by a steady faith that, under the administration of the Almighty, all is ordered for the best, though for several steps of that high administration we are unable at present to account. Hence that calm tranquillity He preserves, and that resolute and magnanimous submission He maintains, amidst the most unpromising circumstances. He knows that in this stupendous universe, there must be many things that lie beyond our comprehension. — As yet thou seest no more than the rise of the Divine government, the beginnings of a great plan, which is not to be completed until the course of ages shall end. Meanwhile darkness must be allowed, for wise reasons, to remain upon many things; severe restraints must be imposed on conduct, and occasional sufferings must be endured. If thou sufferest, sigh and be silent; wait, and be patient. Presume not to exalt thy weak reason against the revelations of Heaven, nor to give vent to thy impatient complaints against the ordinations of thy Supreme Governor. Think with awe, and speak with caution, of what is so much above thee. Wait till thy being shall be unfolded; till it shall have passed through the necessary steps that shall gradually prepare thee for beholding the

secrets of the universe; for understanding the counsels of the God who made it. In the mean time, be content to submit and to adore. Let no other voice be heard from thee but this; "Thou hast made me, "O God! and I am thine, for *in thee I live and move* "*and have my being*. Wherever Thou commandest "me to go, I follow. Whatever Thou appointest "me to suffer, I bear without murmur. It is my "part to persevere in my duty; all the rest I leave "to Thee; to Thee, whose wisdom I revere, whose "goodness I have so often experienced; in whom "therefore I repose implicit trust, that all shall end "well, and the righteous be made finally happy."—*Good is the word which the Lord hath spoken. Not my will, but His be done. Behold, here I am. Let Him do to his servant as seemeth good to Him.* *

Such are the principal dispositions which it becomes us to preserve towards God; to preserve towards Him at all times; not in the solemn hours of devotion only, but when we act in the busy world, or when we walk in retirement amidst the scenes of nature. If this union of reverence, gratitude, and submission, habitually possess our minds, they will of course shoot forth into what is termed *delighting ourselves in God;* thinking of Him with peculiar complacency and warmth of affection; and elevating us sometimes into a sacred transport when we draw nigh to Him in acts of immediate worship, in prayer and praise. Then is the season when the fulness of the soul gives rise to those sublime and pathetic effusions of piety which are recorded of saints in former times: *My soul thirsteth for God; for the living God: when shall I*

* 2 Kings, xx. 19. Luke, xxii. 42. 2 Sam. xv. 26.

come and appear before him? I will lift up my hands in thy name; my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and with fatness, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee. O, that I knew where to find him, that I might come even to his seat! * When such sentiments as these, of ardent affection towards God, chastened by reverence and submission, as well as warmed by gratitude, predominate in our hearts, and when they exert their proper influence in purifying and regulating our life, we may then be truly said to *love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.*

* Ps. xlii. 2. Ps. lxiii. 4, 5, 6. Ps. lxv. 4. Job. xxiii. 3.

SERMON LXXIV.

On the Moral Character of Christ.

Acts, x. 38.

Jesus of Nazareth — who went about doing good.

THERE are two great aspects under which we may contemplate the appearance of our Blessed Lord on the earth. One is, his coming into the world in order to make expiation to Divine justice, by his sufferings and death, for the guilt of the human race. The other is, his coming to act as the enlightener and reformer of the world, by his doctrine and his life. The first of those views is the most sublime; as on the atonement which he made for us, depend all our hopes of the pardon of sin, and of life eternal. In the other view, it is also of high importance that all Christians should frequently consider him, in order to the proper regulation of their conduct: the observation of his example is no less necessary for this purpose, than attention to his doctrine; as by his doctrine he taught us what we are bound to do, so in his example he showed us what we ought to be.

Hence the example of our Blessed Lord has been ever held up by serious writers to Christians for their instruction and imitation. It obviously possesses many advantages above any other standard of conduct. It carries peculiar obligations from gratitude,

interest, and duty, to enforce the imitation of it; and it is the only example, in following which we are certain never to err. It has also another peculiar advantage attending it, which is not so commonly thought of; that is, the universality of its use. It evidently appears that our Lord himself had this benefit to his followers in view, from the train of living which he chose to adopt. Had he pitched upon any one station of life, the influence of his example would have been much more limited. The integrity, for instance, of Samuel as a judge, the devotion of David on the throne, the fortitude of Daniel in the midst of a corrupt court, hold forth indeed splendid instances of virtue, but they hold them out only to a few: whereas when Christ appeared on earth, he confined himself to no one state of fortune or line of life; he did not addict himself to any particular calling; he did not even fix his residence in one place; but he gives us opportunity of viewing him in different places and situations, in all that variety of lights which indiscriminately regard the bulk of mankind: his life was divided between the contemplative and the active; devotion and business equally shared it. We behold him in private life among his disciples, like a father in the midst of his family. We behold him in public life, acting with authority in the discharge of his high commission, assuming the dignity which belonged to his office, and boldly reproving the great and the powerful. We see him sometimes in poverty and obscurity, contemned and persecuted. We see him at other times elevated into public favour, followed by applauding crowds, and entering Jerusalem in triumph. We can challenge all history, sacred or

profane, to show us any eminent personage, saint, philosopher, or hero, whose character was so thoroughly tried, and so fully exhibited to admiration, as that of our Saviour. What adds greatly to the lustre of his example, it was marked by no affected singularities nor peculiar austerities. He did not seclude himself from ordinary society, but conversed among men with that sort of modest piety and virtue which suits itself to the level of human infirmity, and is conspicuous for the discharge of the plain and substantial duties of a good life.

It is not my intention at present to attempt a full survey of all the graces and virtues which distinguished our Lord's life, and ennobled his sufferings and death; as this would lead into a field too extensive for one discourse: I mean to confine myself to the manner in which he fulfilled the social duties, and exercised his benevolence as a man among men. This will afford an instructive view of what may be termed the moral character of Christ in his ordinary intercourse with the world, and will point out a proper model of our behaviour towards one another. The most studied and laboured encomiums never drew a more amiable character than what is contained in the few and plain words of the text; *Jesus of Nazareth went about, doing good.* Let us consider in what manner He fulfilled this character.

I. We are to attend to his assiduity and alacrity in seeking out and embracing every opportunity of doing good: this is the most substantial part of the great virtue of charity. There is a sort of negative goodness with which most men are ready to be satisfied; they applaud themselves if they have kept their hands

free from unjust deeds, and no man can reproach them for working mischief to their neighbour; but with respect to his welfare they are totally indifferent. They remain in a sort of torpid apathy about the concerns of others, without either rejoicing in their prosperity, or being affected with their distresses; this is far below what is required of a good man. We were all designed by our Creator to be parts of one body, members of one great society, where every one was to contribute his part towards the common benefit, and to be made happy by studying to make others so. In proportion indeed as our ability and influence extend, the obligation to be extensively beneficial also grows; but hardly is there any sphere so narrow and circumscribed, as not to afford some opportunities of being useful. — In thy humble and obscure station, thou art apt to think thyself entirely insignificant and lost to the world. To thee, indeed, it may not belong to heal the diseased, to raise the fallen, to supply the indigent, or to bring forward the deserving. But is there none whose spirit thou canst cheer, or whose infirmities thou canst help to lighten? Hast thou no parent, no child, no brother, no friend, to whom thou canst speak the words of comfort in the hour of sorrow, whose mistakes thou canst rectify, or whose erring steps thou canst turn into the right path?

Here let the example of Christ, as far as thy sphere admits it, be before thine eyes, to quicken thy activity and animate thy zeal. The whole history of his life is the history of active and diffusive benignity. Wherever he was present, we find him employed in doing good; either relieving men from their distresses, or making them wise and happy by his

instructions. The whole country around him seemed to be his family, and if in a literal sense he had been the father of them all, they could not have exercised his care, or shared his bounty more. The hungry were fed, and the sick were cured, the blind saw, and the lame walked, wherever he came. His miracles never were mere ostentations of power, but always expressions of goodness. Often he prevented the supplications of the distressed, and, unasked, conferred his favours; but never did any person apply to him for aid and relief without receiving it, whether he was Jew or Heathen, friend or foe. What is especially remarkable in his beneficence is, that it was continued and persevering in the midst of ingratitude. This is one of the hardest trials of virtue, not to be soured by the perversity of men, and which persons even of generous spirits find it the most difficult to bear. But though Christ had to deal with a most untoward and stubborn generation, whom no evidence could convince, and no goodness could mollify; though of all the great numbers who had been objects of his beneficence, we read of few who thankfully acknowledged his kindness, fewer who became his followers, and none who rose up to assert his cause when borne down by unjust persecution; yet, seeking to do good only for its own sake, he persevered to the last in unwearied beneficence. He *overcame evil with good*: it had been his principle, and, it would appear, a noted saying of his, which his disciples remembered, and quoted after his death; *it is more blessed to give, than to receive.* *

* Acts, xx. 35.

II. We ought to propose for imitation that humanity of manners, that gentleness and affability which appeared in the whole of our Lord's behaviour. This relates to the manner of conferring benefits which is often as material as the benefits themselves are. These are sometimes conferred so ungraciously, as to carry the air of insults rather than benefits; whereas, when they bear the marks of proceeding from real kindness, their value is heightened, and they are received with double pleasure. There are numberless occasions, when the discovery of a humane temper, and the lesser offices of obliging and courteous behaviour, contribute essentially to the happiness of others, and supply the place of greater benefits, which may not be in our power to bestow. — For this amiable spirit our Lord was remarkably distinguished. He was open and affable to all, and easier of access than his own disciples. On different occasions we find him checking his disciples, when they restrained the forwardness of the multitude who pressed upon him, seeking relief. Nay, he rebuked them for forbidding little children to come to him, whom the fondness of the parents sought to introduce to his presence. He took the children into his arms and blessed them, and propounded them to his disciples as emblems of that innocence and simplicity which are requisite for our entering into the kingdom of heaven. * — He conversed familiarly with all sorts of people, and readily answered the questions they put to him. He had nothing of that haughty and distant reserve which we so often see maintained by men of

* Mark, x. 14.

the world, and which prevents them from holding intercourse with any whom they consider as their inferiors in reputation or in rank. On the contrary, as our Lord was ready to do good to all, so he disdained not to receive kindness from others; complying cheerfully with the desire of those who invited him to their houses, and accepting in good part the proffered tokens of their well-intended respect. For such instances of courtesy he was reproached by the Jews as one who wanted that external severity of manners which they imagined to belong to a professed reformer of the world. But He, who knew what was in the heart of man, saw that gentleness and condescension were more effectual methods of gaining men over to goodness, than harshness and austerity; and therefore did not decline all conversation with men of doubtful or blemished lives, as long as there was any hope of making them better. It was indeed true that he was, as they reproached him, *a friend to publicans and sinners;* for he was a friend to every one to whom he could do good.—At the same time, it is of importance to remark, that this benignity of our Lord's manners never betrayed him into the opposite extreme, never degenerated into that easiness of good nature, which too often leads men to slide into the manners and habits of those with whom they converse, though they cannot approve of them. Wherever the interests of virtue were concerned, our Saviour was inflexibly firm. He boldly lifted up his voice, and testified against vice and corruption wherever he beheld them. He freely reproved the greatest men of the nation for their hypocritical and assumed shows of sanctity; and the civility, with

which he was entertained in the house of a Pharisee, did not prevent him from inveighing severely against the vices of that sect in their own presence. *

III. We are to consider our Lord in the light of a faithful and affectionate friend, and his example as the pattern of all the offices that belong to virtuous friendship. The Apostles whom he chose for his intimate companions and friends, were men of honest and candid minds, and of great plainness and simplicity of character; men, who from real esteem, and from conviction of the truth of his mission, had become his followers, and who, notwithstanding the disadvantages of his fortune in the world, continued to follow him to the last. At the same time, together with those essential principles of worth, they had also great defects. They were most of them of timid and fearful disposition, of slow understanding, backward to apprehend spiritual things, and still prepossessed with the favourite prejudice of their nation, that the promised Messiah was to be a great conqueror, who was to rescue their country from foreign subjection, and raise it to empire and grandeur. — Among these men our Lord passed all the hours of his private life, acting every part of an affectionate and faithful friend, commending, advising, and reproving, with great sincerity, and at the same time, with great tenderness. In his manner of living he put himself perfectly on a level with them. Some of them he honoured with greater intimacy than others; but like a prudent father in his family, he allowed none of them to affect superiority over the rest, and checked

* Luke, xi. 37.

all that tended to rivalry among them. He never flattered them in their failings. He never soothed them with vain hopes. He never concealed the disagreeable consequences that would follow from adherence to his cause. Again and again he inculcated what they were backward and unwilling to believe concerning himself; and though the questions they put often discovered a degree of gross ignorance, he answered them all without passion or impatience, training them up by degrees to the events that were to happen after his decease, and to the high part they were destined then to act in the world.

How happy would it be for mankind, if more attention were given to this noble pattern of fidelity and complacency which ought to prevail among friends, and of the indulgence due to the failings of those who are, in their general character, worthy and estimable persons! This amiable indulgence he carried so far, that in one of the most critical seasons of his life, during his agony in the garden, when he had left his disciples for a short time, with a strict charge to watch till he should return, but upon his returning found them asleep, all the reproof which their negligence at so important a juncture drew from him was no more than this; *What, could ye not watch with me for one hour?* * — Of the tenderness of our Lord's affections, and the constancy of his friendship, we have a very memorable instance, in that mixture of friendship and filial piety which he discovered during the cruelty of his last sufferings. It is recorded, that when he hung upon the cross,

* Matt. xxvi. 40.

beholding John his beloved disciple, and Mary his mother, standing as spectators below, he said to John, *Behold thy mother;* and to Mary, *Behold thy son;* thus committing his forlorn mother to the charge of his friend John, as the most sacred and honourable pledge he could leave him of their ancient friendship. The heart of his friend melted; and, from that hour, we are told, *he took her home with him to his own house.* It is John himself who has recorded to us this honourable testimony of his master's friendship.*

IV. The example of Christ holds forth for our imitation his steady command of temper amidst the highest provocations, and his ready forgiveness of injuries. Though he had revenge always in his power, he constantly declined it. On one occasion, when his disciples wished him to call down fire from heaven to punish the inhospitality of the Samaritans, *he turned and rebuked them, saying, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* † When he was *reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.* The insults which he often received from a brutal multitude, had no power to alter the meekness and generosity of his disposition: he continued to beseech and intreat them, when they sought to chase him away from amongst them. When they accused him of being in confederacy with evil spirits, he answered their injurious defamation only with mild and calm reasoning, that if he by means *of Satan did cast out Satan, his kingdom must be divided against itself, and could*

* John, xix. 26, 27. † Luke, ix. 55.

not stand. At his trial before the High Priest, when he was most injuriously treated, and contrary to all law was, in face of the court, struck by one of the High Priest's officers, what could be spoken more meekly and reasonably than his return to this usage at a time when all circumstances concurred to exasperate the spirit of an innocent man; *if I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?* * — When his enemies were completing the last scene of their cruelty in putting him to death, all their barbarous usage and scurrilous taunts on that occasion, provoked not one revengeful thought in his breast, nor drew from his lips one misbecoming expression; but, on the contrary, the last accents of his expiring breath went forth in that affectionate prayer for their forgiveness; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!* — Shall we, my friends, who have before our eyes such an example of generous magnanimity, of continued self-command amidst the most trying situations, not be ashamed of giving vent to passion on every trifling provocation, and fiercely demanding reparation for the smallest injury; we who, from the remembrance of our own failings have so many motives for mutual forbearance and forgiveness; while He, on the other hand, had done no wrong, had never given offence to any; but had the justest title to expect friendship from every human being?

V. Let us attend to the sympathy and compassion which our Lord discovered for the sufferings of mankind. It was not with a cold unfeeling disposition

* John, xviii. 27.

that he performed the office of relieving the distressed. His manner of bestowing relief clearly showed with what sensibility he entered into the sorrows of others. How affecting, for instance, is the account of his restoring to life the son of the widow of Nain, as it is related in the beautiful simplicity of the evangelical historian? *When he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow; and much people of the city was with her.* All the circumstances in this incident are moving and affecting; and it presently appeared with what tender sensibility our Lord was touched at the sight of so mournful a procession. *And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not; and he came and touched the bier, (and they that bare him stood still,) and he said, Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead, sat up and began to speak; and he delivered him to his mother.** The whole scene of raising Lazarus from the grave, places our Saviour's sympathy in the strongest light. As soon as he came among the mourning friends, although he knew the cause of their mourning was speedily to be removed, he could not forbear partaking of their sorrow; *He groaned, and was troubled in spirit;* and when surrounded by a crowd in tears, he approached to the grave of his deceased friend, it is expressly recorded, to the eternal honour of his feelings, *Jesus wept; and the Jews said, Behold, how he loved him!* † — In like manner, when, for the last time, he was about to enter into Jerusalem, though the certain knowledge of all the cruelties which were

* Luke, vii. 12—16. † John, xi. 35.

prepared for him there would have filled the breast of any ordinary person with indignation and hatred, instead of such emotions, the foresight of the direful calamities which hung over that devoted city melted his heart; and when he drew near to it and beheld it, *he wept;* pouring forth that pathetic lamentation; *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! If thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes!* * Thus, as a man, he indulged all the amiable feelings of our nature, teaching us that it is our duty to regulate our passions, not to extirpate them.

Such was Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of our religion. A part only of his character I have now attempted to delineate; many other of his eminent graces and virtues have been left in the shade. But in what we have now contemplated of his behaviour as a man among men, we behold a perfect model of the conduct we ought to hold in the ordinary intercourse of society with one another. We have seen him attentive to every opportunity of being beneficent and useful; in his behaviour to all men, affable and obliging; to his friends, faithful and indulgent; to his enemies, generous and forgiving; to the distressed, full of tenderness and compassion. I might also have dwelt upon the peaceful spirit he displayed on all occasions; his respect as a subject, to the

* Luke, xiii. 34.—xix. 42.

civil laws and government of his country; discouraging a factious and mutinous spirit; paying tribute when demanded; exhorting his followers to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, as unto God those which are God's. Enough has been said to show what a blessing it would prove to the world, if this illustrious example were generally followed. Men would then become happy in their connections with one another. This world would be a blessed dwelling; and the society of human beings on earth would approach to the joy and peace of the societies of the just in heaven.

SERMON LXXV.

On the Wounds of the Heart.

PROVERBS, xviii. 14.

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

THERE are two classes of goods and evils belonging to man; those which respect his corporeal, and those which respect his spiritual state. Whatever is of an external nature, is sufficiently the object of attention to all men. In the health and vigour of the body, and in the flourishing state of worldly fortune, all rejoice: and whatever diminishes the one or the other is immediately felt and lamented. These are visible and striking objects on which our senses and imagination are accustomed to dwell. But to procure an equal attention to what is inward and spiritual, is much more difficult. It is not easy to convince men that the soul hath interests of its own, quite distinct from those of the body, and is liable to diseases and wounds as real as any which the body suffers, and often much more grievous. What passes within the hearts of men, is always invisible to the public eye. If it be of the pleasing and satisfactory kind, they have no occasion to disclose it; and if it be of a painful nature it is often their intent to conceal it. In the mean time, *the heart knoweth its own bitterness*: and from its being secreted from public

observation and concentrated within the breast, it is felt the more deeply. — *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity;* the natural vigour and courage of his mind may enable him to surmount the ordinary distresses of life; to bear with patience poverty, sickness, or pain, as long as he is conscious that all is right and sound within. But if within him, the disease rankles in his mind and his heart; if that which should sustain him serves only to gall and torment him; to what quarter can he then look for relief, or to what medicine apply, when that which should have cured his other wounds is itself diseased and wounded? *A wounded spirit who can bear?*

The spirit or soul of man is wounded chiefly by three causes; by Folly, by Passion, by Guilt.

I. It is wounded by Folly; that is, by vain, light, and improper pursuits; by a conduct, which though it should not be immediately criminal, yet is unsuitable to one's age, character, or condition in the world. Good sense is no less requisite in our religious and moral behaviour, than it is in our worldly affairs. Whoever departs far from the plain track of sober and reasonable conduct, shall, sooner or later, undergo the consequences of a diseased and wounded spirit. — It often happens, that under the notion of innocent pleasure and amusement, of only following their humour and indulging their taste, while, as they say, they hurt no man, and violate no material duty, many go on for a time, in a course of the most egregious follies, and all along conceive themselves to be, if not very virtuous, at least very inoffensive men. The case is the same with the

diseases of the mind as with the diseases of the body. They lurk for a time unperceived. The seeds of them may be working within, while the person affected imagines himself to be in perfect health; but at length a crisis comes, which brings the secret venom forth, and makes all its malignity be felt.

In this age of dissipation and luxury in which we live, how many avenues are constantly open that lead to the Temple of Folly? To how many temptations are all, but especially the young and the gay, exposed, to squander their whole time amidst the circles of levity, and haunts of pleasure? By idleness and extravagance, and the vain ambition of emulating others in the splendid show of life, multitudes run into expense beyond their fortune. The time which should be employed in training them for future significance in the world, they lose in frivolous amusements and pursuits; or in the midst of these, bury the fruits of any good education they had already received. Idle associates are ever at hand to aid them in inventing new plans of destroying the time. If that fatal engine of mischief, the gaming table, then attracts and ensnares them, their career of folly will soon be completed; the gulf of destruction opens, and ruin is at hand.

Supposing some incident to befal, as befal at some time it must, which shall awaken persons of this description from their dreams of vanity; which shall open their eyes to the time that they have mispent, and the follies that they have committed; then, alas! what mortifying and disquieting views of themselves will arise? How many galling remembrances will crowd upon their minds? They see their youth thrown away in dishonourable or trivial pursuits; those valuable

opportunities which they once enjoyed, of coming forward with distinction in the world, now irretrievably lost; their characters tarnished and sunk in the public eye; and the fortune, perhaps, which they had inherited from their ancestors, wasted among idle companions. They behold around them the countenances of their friends angry and displeased. To the grave and the respectable, they dare not look up. They with whom they once started in the race of life as their equals, have now got far before them; they are obliged to respect them as their superiors, and with shame to view themselves left behind disgraced and dishonoured.—Can any situation be more humbling and mortifying than this? Is not this to suffer in a high degree the misery of a wounded spirit, when a man sees that, by mere thoughtlessness and folly, he has exposed and degraded himself; beholds his character, his health, his interest sinking in the world; and is sensible that with his own hands, and by his own blind and ill-judged conduct, he has brought this ruin on himself?—Conscience now begins to exert its authority, and lift its scourge. At every stroke it inflicts, the wounds of the heart open and bleed; and though it exercise not the same dread severity as when it upbraids us with notorious crimes, yet still it is the voice of God within, rebuking and punishing reasonable creatures for folly as well as for guilt; nor indeed are follies of such a kind as have been described, ever free from many stains of guilt.

II. If by folly the spirit is thus liable to be wounded, it is exposed by Passion to wounds still more severe. Passions are those strong emotions of

the mind which impel it to desire, and to act, with vehemence. When directed towards proper objects, and kept within just bounds, they possess an useful place in our frame; they add vigour and energy to the mind, and enable it, on great occasions, to act with uncommon force and success; but they always require the government and restraint of reason. It is in the mind, just as it is in the body. Every member of the body is useful, and serves some good purpose. But if any one swell to an enormous size, it presently becomes a disease. Thus, when a man's passions go on in a calm and moderate train, and no object has taken an inordinate hold of any of them, his spirit is in this part sound, and his life proceeds with tranquillity. But if any of them have been so far indulged and left without restraint, as to run into excess, a dangerous blow will then be given to the heart.—Supposing, for instance, that some passion, even of the nature of those which are reckoned innocent, shall so far seize a man as to conquer and overpower him, his tranquillity will be destroyed. The balance of his soul is lost; he is no longer his own master, nor is capable of attending properly to the offices of life which are incumbent on him, or of turning his thoughts into any other direction than what passion points out. He may be sensible of the wound. He feels the dart that is fixed in his breast, but is unable to extract it.

But the case becomes infinitely worse, if the passion which has seized a man be of the vicious and malignant kind. Let him be placed in the most prosperous situation of life; give him external ease and affluence to the full; and let his character be high, and applauded by the world: yet, if into the

heart of this man there has stolen some dark jealous suspicion, some rankling envy, some pining discontent, that instant his temper is soured, and poison is scattered over all his joys. He dwells in secret upon his vexations and cares, and while the crowd admires his prosperity, he envies the more peaceful condition of the peasant and the hind. If his passions chance to be of the more fierce and outrageous nature, the painful feelings they produce will be still more intense and acute. By violent passions, the heart is not only wounded, but torn and rent. As long as a man is under the workings of raging ambition, disappointed pride, and keen thirst for revenge, he remains under immediate torment. Over his dark and scowling mind, gloomy ideas continually brood. His transient fits of merriment and joy, are like beams of light breaking, occasionally, from the black cloud that carries the thunder. What greatly aggravates the misery of such persons is, that they dare make no complaints. When the body is diseased or wounded, to our friends we naturally fly; and from their sympathy or assistance expect relief. But the wounds given to the heart by ill-governed passions, are of an opprobrious nature, and must be stifled in secret. The slave of passion can unbosom himself to no friend; and, instead of sympathy, dreads meeting with ridicule or contempt. — How intolerably wretched must the condition of Haman have been, when, before all his assembled friends, he was reduced to make this humbling confession of his state; that, in the height of royal favour, and in the midst of the utmost magnificence and grandeur, "all "availed him nothing, so long as he saw his rival, "Mordecai the Jew, sitting at the King's gate."

III. The wounds which the heart receives from Guilt, are productive of still greater pain and misery, than any which have been already mentioned. If beyond being misled by folly, or overcome by passion, a man be conscious to himself of having deliberately committed deeds of injustice or cruelty; of having, perhaps, by wicked arts, seduced the innocent and unwary, to fall the miserable victims of his licentious pleasures; of having ruined, by his dishonesty, the unsuspicious trusting friend; of having amassed wealth to himself, by fraud and oppression, from the spoils of the industrious: in such and similar cases, deep and lasting is the sting which is sent into the heart.

I am aware of the arts which have been devised by criminal men to shelter themselves from the attacks of conscience; of the sceptical principles to which they have recourse; and of the self-deceiving opinions with which they flatter themselves concerning their own character, concerning the goodness of God, and the allowances which they hope will be made for human infirmity and strong temptations. But all those palliatives of guilt are no other to the soul, than the empiric medicines that are applied to the diseases of the body; which disguise the disease without removing it; which procure a little temporary ease, and conceal from the patient the danger of his state; but drive the distemper to the vitals, and make it break forth in the end with redoubled force. Thus may those dangerous opiates of conscience sooth a man for a while, in the days of his prosperity. Amidst the bustle of active life, and as long as the fluster of gay and youthful spirits lasts, he may go on in the commission of many crimes with

smoothness and seeming peace. But let the sober and serious hour come, which, sooner or later, must come to all; let the amusements of life be withdrawn, and the man be left alone to his own reflections; the power of truth will soon prove too strong for all that is opposed to it, and pierce into his heart.——The voice of nature, of conscience, and of God, will make itself be heard within him. He will feel that he is a wretch. He will become despicable in his own sight. He will become sensible that all good men have reason to hate him, and that the just Governor of the world has reason to punish him. Conscience, bringing to remembrance all his secret crimes, will hold them up to his view with this fearful inscription written upon them, *God will bring every work into judgment.*—— Hence the haggard look, and the restless couch, days never free from bitterness, and nights given up to remorse.

This remorse will prey the deeper on the bad man's heart, if it shall happen, as it sometimes does, that there was a period in his life when he was a different man; when, having been educated by virtuous parents in sober and religious principles, and being as yet uncorrupted by the world, he passed his days without reproach or blame. The recollection of what he then felt, compared with the state into which he has now brought himself by forfeited integrity and honour, will wring his heart with sad remembrance. "Once I knew what it was to enjoy all the comforts "of innocence, and to take pleasure in the thoughts "of heaven, when my hands were unstained and my "mind was pure. Then I was ever cheerful, easy, "and free. Heaven and earth seemed to smile upon "me. My nights were peaceful, and my days were

" pleasant. Innocent joys and comfortable hopes
" were ever at hand to entertain my solitary hours.
" — Where now are these gone? Why am I thus so
" altered and changed from what I was, and so
" uneasy to myself? What, alas! have I gained
" by those worldly pursuits and ambitious plans
" which seduced me from the plain and safe paths of
" integrity and virtue!"

SUCH are the wounds of the spirit, occasioned either by folly, by passion, or by guilt, and too often by a complication of all the three together. For though they be of separate consideration, and each of them may be felt in a different degree, yet they are seldom parted wholly asunder from one another. Folly gives rise to unrestrained and disorderly passions. These betray men into atrocious crimes; and the wretched sinner is stung as by a three-headed snake; at once, reproached by reason for his folly, agitated by some strong passion, and tortured with a conscious sense of guilt. — When these disorders of the mind arise to their height, they are, of all miseries, the most dreadful. The vulgar misfortunes of life, poverty, sickness, or the loss of friends, in comparison with them, are trivial evils. Under such misfortunes, a man of tolerable spirit, or of a moderate share of virtue, will be able to find some consolation. But, under the other he can find none. What is but too decisive as to the degree in which they surpass all external evils, they are those wounds of the spirit, the shame of folly, the violence of passion, and the remorse for guilt, which have so frequently produced the fatal crime, so much the reproach of our age and our country; which have driven men to the most

abhorred of all evils, to death by their own hand, in order to seek relief from a life too embittered to be endured. — Far from each of us be such desperate calamities! — But, if it be the certain tendency of those wounds of the heart, to introduce the greatest disquietude and misery into the life of man, then, from what has been said, let us be taught,

In the first place, to give the most serious and vigilant attention to the government of our hearts. It may be thought by some, that the formidable representation I have given of the miserable effects of a wounded spirit, attaches only to them who have gone to the utmost lengths in folly or passion; but that, by some more temperate regulation of conduct, indulgence may be given, without harm, to the free gratification of certain favourite desires. — Be assured, my brethren, that, under ideas of this kind, there lies much self-deception. Supposing it in your power to stop at some given point without rushing into the greatest disorders, still you would suffer from the licence you had taken to drop the government of your hearts. The lesser criminal never escapes without his share of punishment. In proportion to the quantity you have drunk out of the poisoned cup of pleasure, you will feel your inward health and soundness impaired; or, to follow the metaphor of the text, not by a deep wound only, but by every slighter hurt given to the heart, you will suffer in that peace and tranquillity which makes the comfort of life.

But besides this consideration, strict attention is the more requisite to the government of the heart, as the first introduction to those disorders which spread their consequences so deep and wide, is for the most

part gradual and insensible, and made by latent steps. Did all the evil clearly show itself at the beginning, the danger would be less. But we are imperceptibly betrayed, and from one incautious attachment drawn on to another, till the government of our hearts be at last utterly lost; and wounds inflicted there, which are not to be healed without much shame, penitence, and remorse. — How much does this call for the attention of youth in particular; whose raw and unexperienced minds are so apt to be caught by every new and enticing object that is held forth to their passions? How much does it concern them to beware of the commencements of evil, and to listen to the admonitions of the grave and the wise, who have gone through those dangerous paths on which they are beginning to enter? Let them never give up their hearts profusely to any attachment, without the countenance of reason and religion. Let them shut their ears to the seductions of folly and vice, and look with wary eye to those rocks on which so many others have split. — Nor is it only to youth that this admonition belongs. To the levities and passions of youth succeed the more sober follies of advancing years; which, under a graver appearance, are no less liable to seize and wound the heart. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline is perpetually requisite of *keeping the heart with all diligence;* guarding it from whatever would annoy its healthy and sound estate; *as out of the heart are the issues either of Life or Death.*

In the second place, it clearly appears, from what has been said, how much reason we all have to join prayer to the Almighty God, in addition to our own

endeavours of guarding and governing our spirits; beseeching Him who made the heart, and who knows all its errors and wanderings, to aid and prosper us by his grace in this difficult undertaking. Well must he who knows any thing of himself at all, know how greatly divine assistance is needed here, and how little we can depend upon ourselves without it. For *deceitful*, as well as *desperately wicked*, are our hearts; and after all our pretences to ability and wisdom, how often, by the seductions of folly, and of passion, have the wise, the learned, and the admired, been shamefully carried away.—Most earnestly to be desired is that blessing promised in the Gospel, of a new heart and a new spirit, which shall render us superior to the attacks of vanity and vice. *Who can understand his errors; Cleanse me, O God, from secret faults: Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. That which I see not, teach thou me; and lead me in the way everlasting.*

In the last place, all that has been said on the subject tends to impress us with a sense of this awful truth, that the Great God hath already begun to punish bad men for their sins and vices. You see his hand clearly marked in all that they are made to suffer by the Wounded Spirit. You see that he has not delayed all retribution to another world, but hath in this world begun to act as a Governor and a Judge; showing, by an established order of things, that while he loves the righteous, *he hateth all the workers of iniquity*. With a wisdom peculiar to himself, he hath made the punishments due to sinners to arise directly from their own behaviour, and to be inflicted by their own hands. He hath no occasion

to send forth destroying angels against them; the thunder which is ever in his hands, needs not to be pointed at the heads of the guilty. He need only leave them to themselves; and presently their *wickedness begins to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them*, till they fully see and feel what an *evil thing, and bitter it was, to depart from the Lord their God.* Conscious, while their hearts are bleeding within them, that they are only *reaping the fruits of their own doings*, the sense of deserving what they suffer, both aggravates the suffering, and forces them to acknowledge the justice of it.

When we behold such plain marks of wise and just government taking place among men, who shall take upon him to say that all things come alike to all men, and that there is no more than a promiscuous distribution of good and evil by Providence on earth? However it may seem in appearance, it is far from being so in reality. We look to the outside of things. We are dazzled with that tinsel glare which prosperity sometimes throws around the worthless and the wicked. But what is that to true happiness and self-enjoyment? often, how little connected with it? Could you look into the hearts of men, another scene would open. You would see many a heart wounded and bleeding in secret from a guilty conscience and remembered crimes, while gay looks were affectedly put on before the world. Comparing this galled and distressed state of mind, with the free and easy, the light and disencumbered spirit of a worthy and virtuous man, even under the pressures of life, who would forbear to charge Providence, and would readily acknowledge, that though the external distribution of the world's goods be promiscuous, the inter-

nal allotment of happiness is measured by the real characters of men. —— On the whole, let us hold fast by this great truth, and by it govern our lives, that every man's real happiness or misery is made, by the appointment of the Creator, to depend more on himself, and on the proper government of his mind and heart, than upon any external thing, or than upon all external things put together; that for those who serve God, and study to keep their conscience clear from guilt, God hath provided peace and comfort on earth as well as rewards hereafter; but *saith my God, there is no peace to the wicked.*

SERMON LXXVI.

On all Things working together for Good to the Righteous.

ROMANS, viii. 38.

We know that all Things work together for Good to them that love God, to them who are the Called according to his purpose.

AMONG many ancient philosophers it was a favourite tenet, that all seeming disorders in the world are rendered subservient to the order and perfection of the universe; or, that all things work together for the good of the whole: But to this good of the whole, they conceive the interests of individuals to be oft-times obliged to yield. The revelation of the Gospel has opened to us a higher and more comfortable prospect. For it assures us not only of the direct tendency of all things to general order, but to the consummate happiness of every individual who loves and serves God. While the Deity is ever carrying on the general system of things to its proper perfection, the interest of no one good man is sacrificed in any point to promote this end; but his life is, at the same time, a system complete within itself, where all things are made to conspire for bringing about his felicity. *We know*, says the Apostle in my text, that is, we are assured, not by doubtful reasonings

with regard to which the wisest might be perplexed, but by a divine promise on which the simple can firmly rely, that *all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the Called according to his purpose.* —— This is that capital encouragement of religion, which virtually contains in itself all the other promises made in Scripture to the righteous, and, like a full and exuberant fountain, divides itself into a thousand streams to refresh the life of man with consolation and joy. It will therefore deserve our very full and particular consideration, both as to the extent of encouragement given, and the evidence on which our assurance of it rests.

The first thing which should here draw our attention is, the character of those to whom the encouragement of the text is appropriated. For it is evidently not given indiscriminately to all, but limited to such as *love God*, and *are the Called according to his purpose;* that is, chosen by him to eternal life. But, lest the latter part of this description should appear too secret and mysterious to afford the encouragement intended, it is cleared up by the first and explanatory character, *them that love God.* Here is something plain and satisfactory, on which we can rest. We need not say, Who shall ascend into heaven, in order to bring us down from thence any information, whether our names be written in the book of life? it is sufficient to look into ourselves, and the state of our heart. *The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that thou mayest do it.** They that *love God*, and they who are

* Deut. xxx. 14.

the Called according to his purpose, are the same. Divine love is the sacred character which marks those who are *sealed unto the day of redemption.* — This love of God is not to be understood as signifying merely some occasional ardour of affection; it imports that steady principle of goodness which becomes the spring of a pure and virtuous life. The same character is here meant, which is described in other passages of Scripture, *by fearing and serving God.* They who truly love God, are they who love and imitate the divine perfections; they who love and obey the divine laws; they who love and pursue the divine approbation, as the great aim of their life. —— Keeping this important article ever in view, as a necessary limitation of the gracious declaration in the text, let us proceed to examine the full extent of that encouragement which it affords.

We begin with considering what the *good* is, for which it is here said that all things work in favour of the righteous. It is a term susceptible of very different acceptations. For many things appear good to some which do not appear so to others; nay, the same things which have appeared to ourselves good at one time, have been far from appearing good at another. Assuredly that *good* which God promises as the reward of his servants, must be somewhat worthy of God to bestow; somewhat that depends not on the fluctuation of fancy and opinion, and that is not liable to change with the change of times. It must be some good of a fixed and permanent nature, which will be felt as such in every situation and period of our existence. But it is evident that such characters are not applicable to the external advan-

tages of the world, riches, fame, and honours. These may occasionally be desirable, and at some times confer satisfaction on the possessor. But besides their uncertain and transient duration, they are far from conferring satisfaction at all times, even when they last. On the contrary, it is a certain fact, and manifest to general observation, that a man may possess all the external advantages of fortune, and lead withal a very miserable life. Suppose him to be disquieted in his own mind by envy, jealousy, revenge, or other violent passions, and harassed with a guilty conscience, such a man cannot be said to have attained what is *good*. Would it have been worthy of the Supreme Being to have flattered his servants with the hope only of a good so fallacious, that in certain circumstances it might be consistent with the greatest misery? — No: that good for the sake of which he makes all things work to those that love him, must be founded in the improvement and perfection of their nature in wisdom, grace, and virtue; in their good considered as rational and immortal beings; productive of a felicity which is within them, and shall abide with them for ever. While we look only to a present momentary satisfaction, the Divine Being, in consulting our welfare, provides for the whole of our existence in time and eternity; connects the present with the future; and by his beneficent decree ordains for each of his servants, that which, upon the whole, is *the best*. — While *to the sinner he giveth sore travail, to gather and to heap up; he giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.**

* Eccles. ii: 26.

HAVING ascertained the sense in which we are to understand *the good* for which God maketh all things to work, we proceed to consider what is included in the extent of the expression, of *all things working for this good.* In general, it includes all that happens to good men in this world; every station and condition in which they are placed; every circumstance in their lot, from the beginning to the end of their lives. Nothing befals them fortuitously, nothing happens in vain or without a meaning; but every event possesses its proper and destined place, and forms a link in that great chain of causes which is appointed to carry on their improvement and felicity. As all the rivers upon the face of the globe, however circuitous they may be in their progress, and however opposite in their course, yet meet at last in the ocean, and there contribute to increase the mass of waters; so all the seemingly discordant events in the life of a good man are made to preserve, upon the whole, an unerring tendency to his good, and to concur and conspire for promoting it at the last. What a noble and sublime view does this present of the supreme dominion of Providence, and of its care exercised over every righteous man!

When we descend to a more particular examination of what is included in the expression here used, of *all things*, we may observe, first, that it includes a state of worldly prosperity. For sometimes this is appointed to fall to the share of God's servants; nay, their worth and virtue have often been the means of bringing it about. But it is not one of those things which are good in their own nature, till God makes it work for that purpose. What numbers of men has it poisoned and destroyed, cherishing the

growth of wantonness and folly; and implanting in their breasts the seeds of those bad passions which spring up into many a crime! From such evils the prosperity of good men is guarded by God. The poison is extracted from it, and the salutary part only left. It is rendered to them a comfortable and useful enjoyment of life, affording opportunity for the exercise of many virtues, which otherwise would not have come within their sphere.

But *among all things that work for good*, it is probable that the evils of this life were particularly designed to be included, as what we might have least expected to be subservient to that purpose. It is nevertheless certain, that, from the discipline of adversity, the most salutary improvements of human nature have been often derived. In that severe school, the predominant errors of the mind have been corrected, the intemperance of the giddy spirit has been allayed and reformed, and that manly seriousness acquired, which is the foundation of true wisdom. By the *sadness of the countenance, the heart* of the sufferer *has been made better;* he has been trained up to fortitude of mind, improved in humanity to men, and formed to the habits of devotion and resignation to God.

At the same time, it is only *if need be*, as the Apostle Peter speaks *, that the righteous *are left for a season in heaviness.* If it be certain that all things work for their good, it follows of course that there is no superfluous severity, no needless or unnecessary trouble to them, in the constitution of things. Their afflictions never befal without a cause, nor are sent

* 1 Pet. i. 6.

but upon a proper errand. These storms are never allowed to rise, but in order to dispel some noxious vapours, and to restore salubrity to the moral atmosphere. —— Herein appears, if we may be allowed so to speak, the wonderful art and skill of the Supreme Artificer, the profound depth of the Divine wisdom, in extracting, from distresses and sorrows, the materials of peace and felicity. Nor are only the external calamities of good men subservient to this purpose; but their internal infirmities, their very failings and errors, are made, by the powerful influence of God's grace, to contribute ultimately to their good. They are thereby instructed in the knowledge of themselves; they are properly humbled by the discovery of their own weakness; and trained to that becoming spirit of contrition and returning repentance, which is represented as giving joy to the angels in heaven. He who *maketh the wrath of man to praise him*, is not deficient in wisdom and power, to make even the failings of his servants, in this imperfect state of human nature, redound at last to his own glory, and to their good.

It must not escape observation, that the text suggests, not merely that all things prove good in the issue, or eventually turn out to the benefit of the righteous, but that they *work for it*. This expression carries particular energy. It imports that *all things* are so formed by God, as to become active causes of happiness to those who love him. His infinite wisdom gives to things in themselves most unapt, an aptitude and fitness to fulfil his own great ends; disposes and prepares them for their proper effects; and makes dangers and evils his instruments for accomplishing the felicity of his servants. There is a certain oper-

ation and process always going on, by which, though we are insensible of it, all things are constantly advancing towards a happy issue. In the same manner as the operation of natural causes, though slow and unperceived, is sure; as the seed which is sown in the ground is every moment unfolding itself; and though no eye can trace the steps of its progress, yet with a silent growth, is ripening and shooting forth its stalks, so in the moral world, throughout all the dispensations of Providence, there is the same latent, but certain progress of the seeds of virtue and holiness, tending towards perfection in the end. *Light is sown for the righteous,* as the Psalmist beautifully employs this metaphor, *and gladness for the upright in heart.**

It is said in the text, not only that all things thus work, but that they *work together for good;* intimating that they are made to conspire and to concur with one another, for bringing about what is best on the whole. Taken singly and individually, it might be difficult to conceive how each event wrought for good. They must be viewed in their consequences and effects; considered in all their dependencies and connections, as links hanging together to form one extensive chain. It is by adjusting into one consistent whole, the various events that fill up human life; arranging in the happiest succession all the occurrences of that complicated scene; and bending to his own purpose things which appear most opposite and contrary, that the Almighty accomplishes his great plan in behalf of those who *love him, and are the Called according to his purpose.*

* Psalm xcvii. 11.

SUCH is that great edifice of encouragement and hope, which the Gospel of Christ hath reared for the consolation of those who sincerely love and serve God. It remains now that we examine what the pillars are on which so mighty an edifice rests. The Apostle speaks, you see, in a strain of full assurance. He does not say, we believe, or we hope, but *we know*, that all things work together for good.—— Let us consider,

IN the first place, the evidence in support of this doctrine, which arises from the perfections of the Divine nature. In general that God is good to all, and that his goodness is especially exerted in behalf of the righteous, is a principle of religion which none will dispute. The only question is, how far that goodness extends, and whether we can conceive it as extending to all that is implied in the text? Something, it must be confessed, there is astonishing, and on first view almost incredible in the assertion, that amidst that infinite combination of events which carry on the general order of the universe, nothing shall ever happen but what advances the happiness of each good man; and which shall tend to his private interest, as much as if his existence had formed a system by itself. But how astonishing soever this may seem to us, let us first reflect, that this supposes no effort beyond the power of Him who is Almighty, or beyond the skill of Him who is infinite in wisdom. We must not measure divine operations by the feeble energies of man. God is the first cause of all that exists and acts. All events are, at every moment, in his hand. Nothing can make any resistance to his purpose, or fall out in any way beside, or beyond his

plan. At one glance he perceives how all things are going on throughout his universe. Not the minutest object is overlooked by Him. No multiplicity of affairs distracts Him; for, to the Supreme Intelligence, all things are present at once; and to the concerns of every good man, his observation and attention reach as fully as if there were no other object under his government.

As there is nothing, therefore, in the promise of the text, which Divine power and wisdom cannot effect, so neither is there any thing in it but what Divine goodness gives us reason to believe shall be fulfilled. The goodness of the Supreme Being is very different from that of men. Among them, it is a principle occasionally operating, but always limited, and always subject to alteration and change. Their benefits, though liberally bestowed at one time, will at another time be stopped by the intervention of contrary passions. Their benevolence decays; selfishness and indifference succeed. But, in the nature of the Deity, there is no principle which can produce alteration or change in his benevolent purpose once formed. *Without variableness or shadow of turning*, whom he hath once *loved he loveth to the end. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.** His goodness therefore consists, not in a mere temporary effusion of blessings, but is permanent and steady; leading him, not simply to bestow some things that are good, and then to stop, but to carry his gracious purpose to the utmost; in every instance to do what is best for his servants on the whole, or, in the words of the text, to make *all things work for their good.*

* John, xiii. 1. Rom. xi. 29.

Let us now consider what it would import, if any single occurrence were to happen in the course of human affairs, which had not a good design; which did not, in one form or other, promote the benefit of the righteous. What would it import, but that in such an instance, either the Divine power and wisdom had fallen short of their effect, or the Divine goodness had neglected and forsaken the virtuous? It were blasphemous to suppose that the nature of the Deity was changed; or that there were, in his government of the world, some vacant spaces, or neglected intervals, in which he suffered the reins of administration to drop out of his hands, and some evil principle to counteract his general system. But as all such suppositions are manifestly inconsistent with the nature of that God in whom Christians believe, there appears to follow, from the consideration of his perfections, evidence next to demonstration, for the truth of that doctrine which the text contains.

But that it may not rest its evidence on our own reasonings only, let us next consider what discovery of his high designs God hath been pleased to make in the Revelation of the Gospel. Here it is amply sufficient to have recourse to one signal dispensation of his government, the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. Hence arises an argument which carries the most convincing force; and which accordingly, in a few verses after the text, is employed by the Apostle in support of that doctrine I have been illustrating. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also, freely give us all things?* — Can we in any instance distrust Him who hath given us this highest proof

of his love? If he scrupled not to bestow this best gift, is there any other blessing he will be inclined to withhold? Having already done so much, will he leave incomplete his own great work? — By the death of Christ, we are taught in Scripture, that atonement was made for sin. He underwent in his sufferings the punishment due to us. He is said to have been *wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; to have borne our sins in his own body on the tree.* From this view of the doctrine of redemption, it naturally follows, that Christ having purchased for his followers the pardon of their sins, the afflictions they now undergo are not properly to be considered as punishments, but as chastisements intended for their good. — Add to this, that it is the peculiar province of our Lord in his present exalted state, to administer all things for the good of his church. For this end his regal power is employed. To this end his mediation and intercession are directed: and either these must in some cases prove ineffectual, or it must follow that all things work for the good of them who love him. As much evidence then as we have for those capital truths on which the whole of Christianity rests, the same we have for that high encouragement afforded by the text.

It remains to take notice, in the last place, of the express and multiplied promises of the sacred Scripture to the same purpose with that in the text. Though the text alone might have appeared sufficient for our encouragement; yet, as repeated assurances of the same thing come home with greater weight to the mind, it hath pleased God to make this full provision for confirming the trust and hope of his servants: and there can be no doubt that the plain and

explicit words of the Divine promises have had the most comfortable influence on many who could not so well have supported themselves under the trials of life, either by reasonings taken from the Divine perfections, or by inferences drawn from the doctrine of redemption. Accordingly, we are not left merely to reason or to infer, but are in express terms told by God himself, *that godliness shall be profitable unto all things; that God the Lord is a sun and a shield, giving grace and glory, and withholding no good thing from them that walk uprightly; that no evil shall happen to the just; for the Lord is their keeper, who never slumbers nor sleeps; that his eyes are ever on the righteous; that when they pass through the waters, he will be with them, and through the rivers they shall not overflow them;* and in fine, *that all his paths are mercy and truth to such as fear him and keep his covenant.** These promises, and many more to the same effect, with which the Scripture abounds, plainly express a particular care of Heaven exercised about every single good man; they signify as real an interposition of Providence, as if the laws of nature had been suspended on his account.

The opinion entertained by some, that the Providence of God extends no farther than to a general superintendence of the laws of nature, without interposing in the particular concerns of individuals, is contrary both to reason and to Scripture. It renders the government of the Almighty altogether loose and contingent, and would leave no ground for reposing any trust under its protection. For the majority of human affairs would then be allowed to fluctuate in a

* 1 Tim. iv. 8. Ps. lxxxiv. 11. Ps. cxxi. 3, 4, &c.

fortuitous course, without moving in any regular direction, and without tending to any one scope. The uniform doctrine of the sacred writings is, that throughout the universe nothing happens without God; that his hand is ever active, and his decree or permission intervenes in all; that nothing is too great or unwieldy for his management, and nothing so minute and inconsiderable as to be below his inspection and care. While he is guiding the sun and the moon in their course through the heavens; while in this inferior world he is ruling among empires, *stilling the ragings of the waters and the tumults of the people*, he is at the same time watching over the humble good man, who, in the obscurity of his cottage, is serving and worshipping Him. In order to express this vigilance of Providence in the strongest terms, our Saviour Himself has said that the very *hairs of our head are all numbered by God;* and that *while two sparrows are sold for a farthing, not one of them falls to the ground without his pleasure.* The consolation which this affords he applies to his disciples in what follows: *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.** It is on this doctrine of a special and particular Providence he grounds that exhortation against worldly solicitude and anxiety, which accords so fully with the argument we have been pursuing; *your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of; take therefore no thought for the morrow; but seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.* †

* Matth. x. 31. † Matth. vi. 32, 33.

THUS it has been shown on what grounds our assured belief rests of the declaration in the text, that all things are made to work for the good of the righteous. It is not a promise which admits of ambiguity, and which we might be afraid to interpret to its full extent. It is on every side confirmed by the most sober reasonings we can form from the Divine perfections; by the whole tenor of the dispensation of redemption; by many repeated assurances given us in the sacred writings.

THE great objection, I am aware, that will be started by many against the whole of what has been advanced in this discourse, is founded on the seeming prevalence of evil and disorder in the world. This, it will be said, is so conspicuous as to be inconsistent with the representation that has been given of a Supreme Being, who attends, in every instance, to the welfare of every good man. The present state of the world may be suspected to carry more the appearance of a conflict between two opposite principles of good and evil, which divide the empire of the world, and of course create a mixture of some good things with more that are evil. How often, it will be said, are the best men insensible of any such gradual improvement, or any such tendency in the general course of things, as has been represented to promote their interest; but on the contrary, left comfortless and forlorn, in the midst of surrounding prosperous vice, to mourn over disappointed hopes and bitter sorrows, without receiving the least mark of favourable intentions from Heaven? Hence the exclamations they have often uttered; "Where is "the Lord, and where the sceptre of righteousness

"and truth? Doth God indeed see, and is there "knowledge in the Most High? Or hath he *forgot-* "*ten to be gracious, and in anger shut up his tender* "*mercies?*"

Now, in answer to such objections, let us consider how much reason there is for ascribing those dark and dreadful appearances, to the narrow and confined views which our state allows us to take. The designs of the Almighty are enlarged and vast. They comprehend not only the whole of our present existence, but they include worlds unknown, and stretch forwards into eternity. Hence, much darkness and mystery must of course rest at present on the administration of God; and we, who see only so small a portion of a great and complicated system, must be very inadequate judges, both of the tendency of each part, and of the issue of the whole. We behold no more than the outside of things. Our views glide over the surface; and even along that surface they extend but a short way. But under the surface there lie hidden springs, that are set in motion by a superior hand, and are bringing forwards revolutions unforeseen by us. There are *wheels moving within wheels*, as the prophet Ezekiel beheld in mysterious vision.* —— We, measuring all things by the shortness of our own duration, are constantly accelerating our designs to their period. We are eager in advancing rapidly towards the completion of our wishes. But it is not so with God. In his sight *a thousand years are as one day:* and while his infinitely wise plans are continually advancing with sure progress, that progress to our impatience appears slow. Let us

* Ezek. x. 10.

have patience for a while, and these plans shall in due time be developed, and will explain themselves. His language to us is, *What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.**

Let us attend to the analogy of Nature. We shall find it to hold very generally, both in the moral and natural world, that nothing arises suddenly to the perfection of its state; that all improvement is carried on by leisurely gradations; and that most frequently it is through harsh and unpromising beginnings things are brought to a favourable conclusion. This might be illustrated by many examples: —Take, for one instance, the progress of the seasons. Who that for the first time beheld the earth, in midst of winter, bound up with frost, or drenched by floods of rain, or covered with snow, would have imagined that Nature, in this dreary and torpid state, was working towards its own renovation in the spring? Yet we by experience know that those vicissitudes of winter are necessary for fertilizing the earth; and that under wintry rains and snow lie concealed the seeds of those roses that are to blossom in the spring; of those fruits that are to ripen in summer; and of the corn and wine, which are, in harvest, to make glad the heart of man. We perhaps relish not such disagreeable commencements of the pleasing season. It would be more agreeable to us to be always entertained with a fair and clear atmosphere, with cloudless skies, and perpetual sunshine; while yet in such climates as we have most knowledge of, the earth, were it always to remain in such a state, would refuse to yield its fruits; and in the midst of our imagined scenes of beauty,

* John, xiii. 7.

the starved inhabitants would perish for want of food. —— Let us therefore quietly submit to Nature and to Providence. Let us conceive this life, of whose evils we so often complain, to be the winter of our existence. Then the rains must fall, and the winds must roar around us. But, sheltering ourselves, as we can, under a good conscience, and under faith and trust in God, let us wait till the spring arrive. For a spring, an eternal spring, awaits the people of God. In the new heavens and the new earth, no storms shall any more arise, nor any unpleasing vicissitudes of season return. It shall then at last appear how former sufferings have produced their proper effect; how the tempests of life have tended to bring on an everlasting calm; in fine, how *all things have wrought together for good to them that love God, and who are the Called according to his purpose.*

SERMON LXXVII.

On the Love of our Country.

[Preached 18th April, 1793, on the day of a National Fast appointed by Government, on occasion of the War with the French Republic.]

PSALM CXXII. 6, 7, 8, 9.

Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sake I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy peace.

IT is one of the infirmities belonging to human nature, that continued enjoyment of the highest blessings is apt to depreciate them in our esteem. This unhappy weakness shows itself, not only with respect to the light of the sun, and the beauties of nature, which we have been long accustomed to behold, but also with respect to health, peace, religion, and liberty. Let any one of those blessings have been long familiar to us; let a tract of time have effaced the remembrance of the distress which we suffered from the want of it; and it is surprising how lightly men are ready to prize the degree of happiness which they continue to possess. — In the midst of that peaceful and secure state which the inhabitants of this land have long

enjoyed; surrounded with the chief blessings that render life comfortable; how few have any just sense of the gratitude they owe to Heaven for such singular felicity? Nay, is it not much to be lamented that there should have sprung up among us an unaccountable spirit of discontent and disaffection, feeding itself with ideal grievances and visionary projects of reformation, till it has gone nigh to light up the torch of sedition? —— When government has now, for wise and proper reasons, called us together in a religious assembly, our thoughts cannot be more suitably employed than in reviewing the grounds on which, as good Christians and faithful citizens, we have reason to entertain the warmest affection for our native country, and to put a just value on that constitution of government, civil and sacred, under which it is placed. — In the words of the text you see with what zeal the heart of the pious Psalmist glowed for the prosperity of his country. By the accumulation of expressions which he employs, and the variety of topics he suggests, you see the fervour with which this subject animated his heart. — It will be proper to consider, first, the grounds on which love for our country rests: and next, the duties to which this affection naturally gives rise.

But, before entering on any of those topics, it may be proper to take notice of the speculations of some pretended philosophers, who represent the love of our country as hardly entitled to any place among the virtues. They affect to consider it as a mere prejudice of education; a narrow attachment, which tends to operate against more enlarged interests. We ought, say they, to view ourselves as citizens of

the world, and extend our benevolence, equally to all nations and all mankind. — Nothing can be more empty and futile than such reasonings. The wisdom of our Creator hath linked us by the ties of natural affection; first to our families and children; next to our brothers, relations, and friends; then to our acquaintance, and to the several societies and communities to which we belong. By instincts implanted in our nature, He has formed our hearts to enter readily into their interests; and has thus directed our benevolence to act primarily within that sphere, where its exertions can be most powerful and most useful. It is evident, that by acting on this plan, the general welfare is promoted in a much higher degree, than if our social affections had no particular direction given them, but were to float, as it were, in empty space without any more determined object on which to act than the whole human race, where they never could act with any effect. He who contends that he is not bound to have any more concerns for the interests of Great Britain, than for those of France, or any other country, ought to hold, on the same grounds, that he is under no obligation to consult the welfare of his children and family, his brothers and friends, more than that of the most distant stranger; being equally connected, as he holds, with all, by the common brotherhood of the human race. It is much to be suspected, that this wonderful extensive philanthropy is only the language of those who have no affections at all; or perhaps, that it is the language assumed by some, who, bearing in their hearts a secret preference to the interests of another country above their own, but a preference which they choose not to avow, affect to

cover it under this disguise, of a liberal, enlarged spirit.

Let us, my friends, disclaiming all such refinements of false philosophy, and following the dictates of plain good sense, and natural affection, resolve to love our native country, and in every proper way to show our attachment to it. This was the spirit which so honourably distinguished patriots, heroes, and legislators of old, and has transmitted their names with veneration to posterity; while they who felt no affection for the country to which they belonged, or who were treacherous to its interests, have been stigmatized with infamy among all civilized nations. I admit that there have been occasions, on which attachment to a particular country has been pursued to a very unjustifiable length. Wherever it has led the natives of one country to state themselves as enemies to the rest of mankind, and to endeavour at aggrandizing themselves by ruining all around them, the pretended love of their country is then become no other than a conspiracy against all other nations, and, instead of being a virtue, is the offspring of ambition, pride, and vanity.

I proceed now to show the just grounds on which it becomes us to be zealous for the welfare of that happy island, to which we have the honour and the blessing to belong. Let us consider our native country in three lights; as the seat of private enjoyment and happiness; as the seat of true religion; as the seat of laws, liberty, and good government.

I. As the seat of all our best enjoyments in private life. There, my brethren, after we first drew breath, was our tender infancy reared with care; there, our

innocent childhood sported; there, our careless youth grew up amidst companions and friends; there, our dearest connections were formed; there, after having passed the happiest years of our life, we look forward for our old age to rest in peace. — These are circumstances which endear and ought to endear a home, a native land, to every human heart. If there be any names known among men that awaken tender sentiments in the breast, the names of father, mother, spouse, child, brother, sister, or friend, these all recall our thoughts to our native land, and cannot, even in idea, be separated from it. When we name our own country, we name the spot of the earth within which all that is most dear to us lies. To be long absent from it, is a circumstance of distress; but to be excluded from the hope of ever returning to it, sinks the spirits of the worthy and the brave into extreme depression. Its very dust appears to them to be precious. Its well-known fields, and mountains, and rivers, become, in their eyes, a sort of consecrated ground; the remembrance of which often touches the heart with sensations of more tender joy, than can be raised by scenes more rich, and objects more splendid, in any foreign land.

These are feelings, which nature, or rather the God of nature, has implanted in the mind of man; and base and vile is he who studies to erase them, intimately connected as they are with our very best affections. — Can we think, my friends, how long we have sat *under our vine and our fig-tree*, in peace and joy, encircled by our families and friends, in that happy land we possess; and, with this pleasing remembrance dwelling on our minds, can we think with indifference of any danger which threatens the

welfare of that country which has been the mother, the nurse, the guardian of us all? Can we think, without horror, of foreign invasion laying waste our fruitful and smiling fields, or of lawless anarchy and tumultuary mobs attacking our peaceful habitations? — No! *Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces,* will ever be the earnest prayer of every virtuous man; *for my brethren, and companions' sake, I will ever say, Peace be within thee!*

II. We love our country as the seat of true religion. Freed from the dominion of Popish superstition and darkness which so long overspread the earth, here the light of the blessed reformation continues to shine in its greatest splendour. Here the forms of religious worship are incumbered with no pageantry of vain rites; but, agreeably to God's word, are plain and simple, yet solemn and venerable. Religion has among us neither been the engine of ecclesiastical tyranny, nor the instrument of princely despotism. It has maintained a proper alliance with the regular government of the state, and the order of public tranquillity. The church that has been established by law, in the two separate divisions of the island, is suited to the genius and dispositions of the people in each. While to the established church is given that protection and support from government, which both the interests of religion and the welfare of the state render proper and due; yet no rigid conformity to it is exacted. All persecution for conscience sake is unknown. They who, in their modes of thinking, or in their religious forms, differ from the established church, are at full liberty, without reproach, to worship God according to their own opinions and

the rites of their fathers, as long as they infringe not the public tranquillity nor disturb the state.

I now ask, what establishment of religion more friendly to public happiness could be desired or framed? How zealous ought we to be for its preservation? How much on our guard against every danger which threatens to trouble or overthrow it? — Can there be any among us so infatuated as to wish to exchange it for that new form of things which has produced such fatal effects on a neighbouring land? Were it ever to be introduced among us, it is not the return of ancient superstition, it is not the bondage of the church of Rome, we would have to dread: evils great in themselves, but small in comparison of what such a revolution would produce. As soon as under the guise of philosophy, and with the pretence of unlimited toleration, the established forms of religion were demolished in France, the flood-gates were opened to pour a torrent of avowed infidelity, atheism, and all the grossest immoralities over that devoted country. We have beheld the throne and the altar overthrown together: and nothing but a wretched ruin left, where once a stately fabric stood. We have seen the venerable ministers of religion stripped of their subsistence, torn from their churches, driven from their homes, and forced to wander as exiles, and beg their bread in a foreign land. —— We have seen the last consolation of the wretched destroyed, and the grave sealed against their hope, by the public declaration that death is an eternal sleep. —— Such have been the blessed fruits of that new order of things which boasted of being to restore happiness to all the nations. Such are the consequences we have to

expect among ourselves, if ever the like dangerous opinions shall prevail in Britain. —— With horror let us turn away from the thought. — With earnestness let us *pray for the peace of our Jerusalem; and for the house of the Lord our God, let us zealously seek its good.*

III. We love our country as the seat of liberty and laws; a mild, wise, and happy government. This opens a much wider field of discourse than the bounds of a sermon admit. But on this part of the subject being happily anticipated by so many excellent publications which have lately appeared, I shall content myself with making a few leading observations. — The ends for which men unite in society and submit to government are, to enjoy security to their property, and freedom to their persons from all injustice or violence. The more completely those ends are obtained, with the least diminution of personal liberty, the nearer such government approaches to perfection; I say, approaches to it; for a perfect government is a mere chimera. Before we can expect it to take place, we must wait till we see any one thing whatever arrive at perfection on earth. The two extremes to be guarded against are, despotism, where all are slaves; and anarchy, where all would rule, and none obey.

The British government may appear at different periods to have inclined sometimes to the one, and sometimes to the other of those extremes. In its present state, it may justly be accounted to be removed to an equal distance from either of those evils; and therefore to have approached nearer to the perfection of social order, than any other govern-

ment, ancient or modern. To this point it has arrived in the progress of ages, not in consequence of theories formed by speculative men, such as our modern reformers, but in consequence of experiments made, and trials undergone. Experience, that great parent of all, but especially of political wisdom, taught a brave, generous, and high-spirited people, how to correct, by degrees, preceding evils, and to form the wisest plan for liberty and security. In this state we now find the British constitution. It stands among the nations of the earth, like an ancient oak in the wood, which, after having overcome many a blast, overtops the other trees of the forest, and commands respect and veneration. All foreigners look to it with wonder, and with envy, as the happiest system that ever was devised for uniting dignity in the magistrate and liberty in the subject, with protection and security to all. Justly may we challenge those who attempt to criticise it, to produce, from the annals of history, any example of such a multitude of men as the British subjects, held together in the bonds of civil society, under so few restraints, and with such full enjoyment of freedom as we possess: blessed too for a whole century past with a succession of princes, who made the laws of the land the rule of their government; blessed now with a sovereign at the head of the empire, to whom faction itself cannot impute, throughout his long reign, any acts of tyranny, cruelty, or oppression; whose personal virtues and whose domestic conduct held forth to the nation such a high example of piety, decency, and good order, as, if generally followed, would render all his subjects happy.

In opposition to such sentiments as I have now

delivered in favour of the constitution of our country, we are called upon, by a certain set of men, to look to a republic, as the glory of all governments. There, we are told, every man comes forth to act his part with vigour; and by the exertion of his talents, has opportunities of rising to the highest distinction and power. —— In reply to this, let it be observed, first, that there are no advantages claimed by a republic, but what under the British constitution are enjoyed to the full. On the exertion of any laudable and honourable talent whatever, no restraint is laid; no odious distinctions take place between the nobility and the people; no severe exclusive privileges are possessed by the former to the prejudice of the latter; but merit in every rank has the freest scope, and examples abound of persons rising by their talents from ordinary rank and humble birth to high distinction in the state.

But next, it may be boldly asserted, that of all the forms of government which have been established on the earth, the republican is attended with the greatest disadvantages to those who live under it. In a small state, where the people resemble the inhabitants of one family, the management of their concerns can more safely be carried on by their own joint councils, without any supreme magistrate. But if government be extended over a large territory, and over numerous inhabitants of different orders and fortunes, it has ever been found impossible to preserve any well-regulated balance of power under a republican constitution. It has ever been, and never can be, any other, than a perpetual contest between oligarchy and democracy; between the rich and the poor; between a few popular leaders who aspire to the

chief influence, and the unruly violence of a turbulent multitude. In such states an internal warfare of this kind has been almost always carried on, with such violent convulsions and party animosities, as have given rise to more miseries than have been suffered under any other form of government whatever. —— To no purpose are quoted to us the heroes of Greece and Rome. Amidst the agitations of popular government, occasions will sometimes be afforded for eminent abilities to break forth with peculiar lustre. But while public agitations allow a few individuals to be uncommonly distinguished, the general condition of the people remains calamitous and wretched. Under despotic governments, miserable indeed is the condition of those who are near the throne. But while they are often the sport, and the victims of capricious cruelty, the ordinary mass of the people, at a distance from the thunder of power, are left, for the most part, in their inferior situations, unmolested. Whereas, under a multitude of popular governors, oppression is more extensively felt. It penetrates into the interior of families; and by republican tyranny the humble and obscure are liable to be as much harassed and vexed as the great and the wealthy.

If any one doubt of those facts, let him look at the present state of the republic established in that country to which we have so often been unfortunately obliged to allude. He will there behold a memorable example set forth to the world; but an example, not for imitation, but for instruction and caution; an example, not of exploits to be copied, or of advantages to be gained, but of all the evils against which men, joined in society, ought to stand on their guard.

He will behold the republican halls hung round with monuments of proscriptions, massacres, imprisonments, requisitions, domiciliary searches, and such other trophies of the glorious victory of republicanism over monarchical power. *O my soul, come not thou into their secret; into their assembly, mine honour be not thou united; for their anger was fierce, and their wrath was cruel.* *

Enough has now been said to convince every reasonable subject of the British government, that he has good grounds for loving and respecting his country. It remains to point out the duties to which the love of our country gives rise. Though these branch out into many particulars, they may be comprised under two general heads; the duties which are required of us in our character as private men, and those which belong to us in a political capacity as subjects and citizens.

First, as private men and Christians, let us cultivate those virtues which are essential to the prosperity of our country. The foundation of all public happiness must be laid in the good conduct of individuals; in their industry, sobriety, justice, and regular attention to the duties of their several stations. Such virtues are the sinews and strength of the state; they are the supports of its prosperity at home, and of its reputation abroad; while luxury, corruption, venality, and idleness, unnerve the public vigour, disgrace the public character, and pave the way to general ruin. Every vice, however fashionable, that becomes

* Genesis, xlix. 6, 7.

prevalent, is the infusion of so much poison into the public cup; and in proportion to the degree of its prevalence, will the health and strength of the nation be impaired. Few of us by our arms, and fewer still by our counsels, can have influence in promoting that welfare of our country which all profess to desire. But there is one sphere in which all of us can act as benefactors to it; by setting a good example, each in his own line, and performing a worthy and honourable part. *Righteousness will ever exalt a nation;* and *wickedness* will be, first, the reproach, and then the *ruin of every people.*

Among those virtues to which the love of our country calls us, let us not forget piety to God. Without a proper sense of religion, and a due acknowledgement of that Supreme Power which rules among the kingdoms, no nation was ever found to prosper long. Let those sophistical reasoners, who would teach us that philosophy ought now to supersede the ancient prejudices of Religion, look to the history of those republics which they so highly admire, especially to the history of the Romans. They will there find, that, during the freest and most flourishing periods of the republic, the Romans were the most religious of all nations. The Senate at no time assembled, no consul entered on his office, no great public measure was ever undertaken, without previous religious services, without prayers and sacrifice. After every victory, solemn thanksgivings were offered to the gods; and upon any defeat that was sustained, public humiliations and processions were decreed, in order to deprecate the displeasure of Heaven. That much superstition and folly entered into what they called religion, will be readily

admitted; but still it implied reverence to a supreme Power in heaven, which ruled all the affairs of men, and was entitled to their homage. Hence that sacred respect to an oath, as an inviolable obligation, which long distinguished the Romans; and historians have remarked, that when the reverence for an oath began to be diminished, and the loose epicurean system which discarded the belief of Providence to be introduced, the Roman honour and prosperity from that period began to decline.—— These are things that belong to our admonition, on whom *the ends of the world are come.*

In the second place, as we would show our love to our country, let us join to the virtues of private men, those which belong to us in a political capacity as subjects and citizens. These must appear in loyalty to our sovereign, in submission to the authority of rulers and magistrates, and in readiness to support the measures that are taken for public welfare and defence. Without regard to such duties as these, it is evident, not only that the state cannot flourish, but even that it cannot subsist. Accordingly they are strongly bound upon us by the authority of Scripture. *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; whoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.** Such passages as these, there is little danger of our misunderstanding at present, as if they enjoined a slavish submission to authority in things unlawful.

* Rom. xiii. 1—6.

This is by no means the extreme to which the spirit of the times points, or to which the nature of our civil constitution leads. The full opportunity that is given for the voice of the people being at all times heard, the freedom of discussion on all political matters that is allowed both in discourse and writing, is a sufficient guard against all approaches to unwarrantable stretches of power in the ruler, and to unlimited submission in the subject.

But while we duly value this high advantage of the liberty of the press and the freedom of political discussion, and when we behold it perpetually acting as a censorial check on all who are in power, let us beware, lest, abusing our liberty, we suffer it to degenerate into licentiousness. The multitude, we well know, are always prone to find fault with those who are set over them, and to arraign their conduct; and too often this spirit appears when public dangers ought to silence the voice of discontent, and to unite every heart and hand in the common cause. — The management of a great empire, especially in difficult times, is the conduct of an unwieldy and intricate machine, in directing the movements of which, where is the hand so steady as never to err? Instead of the violent censures which the giddy and presumptuous are so ready to pour forth, moderation in discussing matters of which they are very incompetent judges, would be much more wise and becoming. The art of government and legislation is undoubtedly the most nice and difficult of all the arts in which the human mind can be engaged; and where the greatest preparation of knowledge, experience, and ability, are absolutely requisite to qualify men for the task. But in times when legislation is considered as a trade

which every man is qualified to take up: when the manufacturer quits his loom, and the artisan lays down his tools, in order to contrive plans for reforming the state, and to constitute societies for carrying his plans into execution; what can be expected to follow from such a spirit, if it were to become prevalent, but the most direful confusion?——Were the rashness of some, whose intentions are innocent, the only evil to be dreaded, the danger would be less. But it is always to be apprehended that the operations of such persons are directed by men who have deeper designs in view; who seek to embroil the state in order to bring forward themselves; whose aim it is to rise into eminence, though it were on the ruins of public tranquillity and order. Let such men, if any such there be, consider well what the consequences may be, of fomenting the spirit of presumptuous innovation. It is a dangerous weapon which they attempt to wield. By the agitation which they raise among a blind multitude, they are giving impulse to the motions of a violent engine, which often discharges its explosions on the heads of those who first touched its springs.

Upon the whole, let us, my brethren, be thankful that our grounds of discontent, whether founded on real or imaginary grievances, are so few; and that, for so great a number of public blessings, we have reason to bless the God of Heaven. We live in a land of pure religion, of liberty and laws, and under a just and mild government. However the opinions of men may differ about this or that political measure adopted by government, it may with confidence be said, that we have much reason to respect those

rulers, under whose administration the empire, though engaged in a hazardous and expensive war, has all along continued to hold a high rank among the nations of Europe, and has attained to that flourishing state of commerce, opulence, and safety, in which we behold it at this day: insomuch that perhaps the greatest dangers we have to apprehend, arise from the jealousy with which rival nations behold our superiority at sea, and our wealth and strength at home. — Let our prayers ascend frequently to Heaven for the continuance of those blessings; for *the peace of our Jerusalem; for peace within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces;* and let the admonition of Scripture never be forgotten; *My son, fear thou God; honour the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change.**

* Prov. xxiv. 21. 1 Peter, ii. 17.

SERMON LXXVIII.

On a Contented Mind.

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2 Kings, iv. 13.

Say now unto her, "Behold thou hast been careful for "us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? "Wouldst thou be spoken for to the King, or to the "Captain of the Host?" And she answered, "I "dwell among mine own people."

A PIOUS and respectable woman of Shunem had exercised great hospitality to the prophet Elisha. In order to accommodate him in his various journeyings, she had caused a chamber to be built for him, adjacent to her house, where he might be furnished with all that, according to the simplicity of those times, was wanted for his entertainment. In the text, the Prophet, by his servant Gehazi, acknowledges the obligations he lay under to this good woman for her care and attention; and being at that time in favour with the king of Israel, desires to know, whether, in return for her kindness, he should apply to the king, or the captain of the host, in her behalf, and procure advancement to her in rank and fortune. Her answer bespeaks all the modesty of one who was satisfied and contented with her present lot. Without any affectation of uncommon virtue, or any haughty contempt of the prophet's offers, she

mildly replies, "*I dwell among mine own people.*" "I dwell in the condition to which I was born; in "my native land; among my original connections, "and persons of my own rank; and living there in "peace, I have no desires of aspiring to a higher "rank."

The temper of this worthy Shunamite, who could so properly set bounds to her desires, and enjoy her present condition with contentment, is what I now propose to your imitation. It stands in opposition to that restless and discontented spirit which so often sets men at variance with their condition in the world, makes them look with contempt on that state of life and sphere of action which Providence has allotted them; and encouraging every real or supposed discouragement to prey upon their minds, makes them pine for some change of fortune.

It is proper, however, to observe, that this moderation of spirit which I am now recommending, is not inconsistent with our having a sense of what is uneasy or distressing in our lot, and endeavouring, by fair means, to render our condition more agreeable. Entire apathy, or passive indifference to all the circumstances of our external state, is required by no precept of religion. What a virtuous degree of contentment requires and supposes, is, that, with a mind free from repining anxiety, we make the best of our condition, whatever it is: enjoying such good things as God is pleased to bestow upon us, with a thankful and cheerful heart; without envy at those who appear more prosperous than us; without any attempt to alter our condition by unfair means; and without any murmuring against the Providence of Heaven. —— "In that state in which it pleased God

"to place me at my birth, I am ready to remain, as "long as it shall be his pleasure to continue me there. "He has placed me among my equals. Such com- "forts as he saw meet for me to possess, he has "bestowed. These I shall study to improve; and "by his kind providence favouring my industry and "application, I may hope they will be increased. In "the mean time, I rest satisfied; and complain not. "*I dwell among mine own people.*"

But if this acquiescence in our condition is to be considered as belonging to that contentment which religion requires, what becomes, it will be said, of that laudable ambition, which has prompted many boldly to aspire with honour and success far beyond their original state of life? — I readily admit, that on some among the sons of men, such high talents are bestowed, as mark them out by the hand of God for superior elevation; by rising to which, many, both in ancient and modern times, have had the opportunity of distinguishing themselves as benefactors to their country and to mankind. But these are only a few scattered stars that shine in a wide hemisphere; such rare examples afford no model for general conduct. — It is not to persons of this description that I now speak. I address myself to the multitude; to the great body of men in all the various walks of ordinary life. Them I warn of the danger of being misled by vanity and self-conceit, to think themselves deserving of a much higher station than they possess. I warn them, not to nourish aspiring desires for objects beyond their power of attaining, or capacity of enjoying; and thereby to render themselves unhappy in their present condition, and dissatisfied with all that belongs to it. — By this

restless discontented temper, I shall proceed to show that they incur much guilt, and involve themselves in great folly and misery.

FIRST, discontent carries in its nature much guilt and sin. With this consideration I begin, because I am afraid that discontentment is commonly treated, in a religious view, more slightly than it deserves. A contented temper, we are apt to say, is a great happiness to those who have it; and a discontented one, we call an unlucky turn of mind; as if we were speaking of a good or bad constitution of body, of something that depended not at all on ourselves, but was merely the gift of nature. —— Ought this to be the sentiment, either of a reasonable man, or a Christian? of one who knows himself to be endowed with powers for governing his own spirit, or who believes in God, and in a world to come? What, I beseech you, do all the risings of discontent within you import, but so much concealed rebellion against the government of that Supreme Being, who hath appointed your place in the world? When you repine at your state, as below what you deserved, do you not inwardly tax Him with injustice and partiality, for conferring his favours on others more unworthy of them, and leaving you neglected and humbled? By treating with contempt the blessings he allows to your state, do you not, in effect, tell him that his blessings are not worthy of being enjoyed, and merit no thanks, because he does not give you more? —— The outward expressions of such sentiments, you may suppress. You may affect to appear religious by shows of reverence and homage; but such appearances deceive not God. Every habitually

discontented person is, and must be, ill-affected towards Him: nay, though he would wish to conceal it from himself, he is a secret blasphemer of the Almighty.

Besides impiety, discontent carries along with it, as its inseparable concomitants, several other sinful passions. It implies pride, or an unreasonable estimation of our own merit, in comparison with others. It implies covetousness, or an inordinate desire for the advantages of external fortune, as the only real goods. It implies, and always engenders, envy, or ill-nature, and hatred, towards all whom we see rising above us in the world. Dare we treat that as a slight infirmity, or a constitutional weakness merely, which imports some of the worst dispositions and passions of the human heart? —— The discontented man is never found without a great share of malignity. His spleen irritates and sours his temper, and leads him to discharge his venom on all with whom he stands connected. He can act his part well in no relation of life. In public affairs, and in private business, he is always given to fretfulness and complaint. While the man of contented mind, easy and happy in himself, is disposed for living well with others, and spreads around him that cheerfulness which he possesses; the restless discontented person is a troubler of the world; neither a good friend, nor a good neighbour, nor a good subject or citizen.

In the second place, as this disposition infers much sin, so it argues great folly, and involves men in many miseries. If there be any first principle of wisdom it is undoubtedly this: the distresses that are removeable, endeavour to remove: those which

cannot be removed, bear with as little disquiet as you can; in every situation of life there are comforts; find them out, and enjoy them. But this maxim, in all its parts, is disregarded by the man of discontent. He is employed in aggravating his own evils; while he neglects all his own comforts. — What is it to you, though others are supposed to be happier? Very possibly they are not so; for wide is the difference between being what the world calls prosperous, and being happy. You see no more than the imposing outside of glittering fortune; while, under that gaudy cover, there may be lurking many a bitter sorrow. — But supposing others to be in truth as happy as they seem to be, is there any reason, except mere viciousness of disposition, why their happiness should be a cause of your discontent and misery? Cannot you be at your ease in the shade, because others are basking in the sun? What is this but the unhappy art of extracting from objects that ought to be indifferent to you, materials for your own torment?

"Such reasonings as these," says one, "may be "specious and plausible; but what avail reasonings "to set me at ease, who every day feel myself hurt "and sore from the scorn of those above me; who "am condemned to behold them shining in all the "pomp and splendour of life; while I, through the "injustice of the world, am left in obscurity to "toil for a scanty subsistence?" —— Accuse not the world, my brother. Imagine not, that it is entirely the injustice of the world which produces your unhappiness. The disease lies within yourself. It originates from your pride and self-conceit, joined with the false opinions you have allowed yourself to

entertain of the distinctions of fortune. Those distinctions must take place in every established society. There must be inequality of ranks; and of course a diversity of outward appearance among men. But it is in the outward appearance that the diversity lies, far more than in what is intrinsic to happiness and well-being. —— You *dwell among your own people.* In that rank where Providence had placed you, you are living among your friends and equals; and pursuing that train of life to which you have been bred. But you are eager and restless, till from this quiet obscurity you can rise to some higher elevation, to which you fancy yourself entitled. — Are you aware of the dangers and troubles that would await you there? Supposing you to be in some degree successful, yet, with your new rank of life, would not new burdens begin to oppress you, and new and unknown cares to vex you? How many rivals would you have to encounter? How many slanderers to decry you? How many enemies to combine in opposing you? What mortification would you endure on every disappointment you met with? And on every small step of advancement, what envy would still remain in looking up to those who continued above you? Till at last, tired with the vexations of competition, you should be forced to regret the day when discontent drove you away from *dwelling among your own people.* —— Awake, then, in time, from the dreams of ambition and vanity. Instead of aspiring beyond your proper level, bring down your mind to your state; lest by aiming too high, you spend your life in a train of fruitless pursuits, and bring yourself at last to a state of entire insignificance and contempt.

Let it be farther considered, in order to show the folly of a discontented temper, that the more it is indulged, it disqualifies you the more from being freed from the grounds of your discontent. First, you have reason to apprehend, that it will turn the displeasure of God against you, and make him your enemy. For, what have you to expect from that Providence towards which you are so sullen and unthankful; from that God, whose perfections you injure by your repining and accusing thoughts? How much is it in his power to render you ten times more unhappy than you are at present, by taking away those remaining comforts, which, by your contempt of them, you show yourself unworthy to enjoy? — Next, by your spleen and discontent, you are certain of bringing yourself into variance with the world as well as with God. Such a temper is likely to create enemies; it can procure you no friends. Proud, jealous, and dissatisfied with those around you, you will, in return, be avoided, disliked, and looked upon by them with an evil eye; the discouragements from the world, of which you complain, will daily increase; while the humble, the cheerful, and contented, will, on every occasion, get before you, and attract the good-will of all who can assist them.

Such being the mischiefs, such the guilt and the folly of indulging a discontented spirit, I shall now suggest some considerations which may assist us in checking it, and in reconciling our minds to the state in which it has pleased Providence to place us. Let us, for this purpose, attend to three great objects; to God, to ourselves, and to the world around us.

First, let us speak of God, of his perfections, and government of the world, from which, to every person of reflection who believes in God at all, there cannot but arise some cure to the discontents and griefs of the heart. For, had it been left to ourselves what to devise or wish, in order to secure peace to us in every state, what could we have invented so effectual as the assurance of being under the government of an Almighty Ruler, whose conduct to his creatures can have no other object but their good and welfare? —— Above all, and independent of all, He can have no temptation to injustice or partiality. Neither jealousy nor envy can dwell with the Supreme Being. He is a rival to none, he is an enemy to none, except to such as, by rebellion against his laws, seek enmity with him. He is equally above envying the greatest, or despising the meanest of his subjects. — His dispensations, it is true, are often dark and unaccountable to us; but we know the reason of this to be, that we see only a part of them, and are not yet able to comprehend the whole. This we well know, that we ourselves are often the very worst judges of what is good or ill for us in this life. We grasp at the present, without due regard to consequences: and whether these consequences are to carry the advantages we had promised ourselves, or be pregnant with future evils, is what we cannot foresee. Experience has taught us a thousand times, that God judges better for us than we judge for ourselves. Often have we seen that what we considered at the time as sore disappointment, has proved in the issue to be a merciful providence; and that, if what we once eagerly wished for had been obtained, it would have been so far from making us happy,

that it would have produced our ruin.—The reflection of Solomon, *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?** should often occur to every one who is given to discontent. Placed as we are, in the midst of so much ignorance with respect to the means of happiness, and at the same time under the government of a wise and gracious Being, who alone is able to effect our happiness, acquiescence in his disposal of our lot, is the only disposition that becomes us as rational creatures. To fret and repine at every disappointment of our wishes, is to discover the temper of froward children, not of men, far less of Christians. Christians, amidst all their grievances, have ever these promises to comfort them; that if they *cast their care upon God he will care for them;* that out of evil he bringeth forth good; nay, that at last *he shall make all things work together for good to them who love him.*

In the second place, in order to correct discontent, let us attend to ourselves and our own state. Let us consider two things there; how little we deserve, and how much we enjoy. As to deserving in the sight of God, the great disposer of our lot, we know that we have no claim. We are all sinners; who are so far from having a title to challenge favours as our due, that we must acknowledge it to be of God's mercies that we are not consumed. As to deserving from the world, we are apt indeed sometimes to make high and unreasonable pretensions; yet, surely, very conceited we must be, if we be not disposed to

* Eccles. vi. 12.

admit, that there are many of at least equal merit with us, whose condition in the world is no better, perhaps much worse than ours; who yet make no complaints, whose discontents are not heard. How much splendid genius is buried in forgotten neglect and obscurity? How much real worth and merit is driven forth to suffer all the hardships of a stormy life, while we *dwell among our own people?* —— Look into your state, my brethren, and, before you give vent to peevishness, make a fair and just estimate of all the blessings you enjoy in comparison with others. You would willingly, I know, exchange your condition, in part, with many. You would gladly have the wealth of this man; you would have the high reputation and honour of another; the health, perhaps, and firm vigour of a third. But I ask, Who is there with whom you would wish to make a total exchange; to forego altogether your present self; and to be just what he is, in mind and in body, as well as in outward estate? If this be an exchange, which few, I apprehend, are willing to make, does not this argue, that each man, on the whole, is sufficiently pleased with himself; that there are, in every situation, certain comforts, and certain grounds of self-complacency and satisfaction, which ought in reason to be employed as remedies against discontent?

In the last place, consider the state of the world around you. — You are not happy. You *dwell*, you admit, *among your own people*. But there, say you, "How many vexations do I occasionally experience? "Sometimes distressed for want of health; some-"times disappointed in my plans, and straitened in

"my circumstances; at other times afflicted with "domestic troubles: so that I am far from being as "I would wish to be." —— Pray, my brother, who is there that lives in every respect just as he would wish to live? First, find out such a person; look through all conditions and ranks, and try if you can discover one who will tell you that he has no complaint or uneasiness whatever, before you allow yourself to repine at your present situation. Do you presume to indulge discontent, merely because you are included in the common lot; because you are not exempted from bearing your share of the common burden? What is human life to all, but a mixture of some scattered joys and pleasures, with various cares and troubles?

You have, perhaps, set your heart on some one thing, which if you could attain it, you insist, would put an end to all your complaints, and give you full contentment. — Vain man! will no experience teach you wisdom? Have not you had the same opinion before this of some other object of your desire; and did you not find that you was deceived in the enjoyment? Will you not then at last be persuaded that *all which cometh*, like all that is past, *is vanity?* —— Vanity, believe it, is the indelible character imprinted on all human things. As far as happiness is to be found on earth, you must look for it, not in the world or the things of the world, but within yourselves, in your temper and your heart. Let the world change into one form or another as it will, it will be a vain world to the end; and you, to the end, will be discontented. It cannot give you what you seek. *The sea saith, it is not in me; and the earth saith, it is not in me. Silver and gold are to no purpose*

weighed for the price of it. The decree of the Almighty hath past, and cannot be reversed, that man should find his true contentment, under every condition, only in a good conscience and a well-regulated mind, in a holy life, and the hope of heaven.—You call yourself a Christian. Does not that name import that you consider yourself as a pilgrim and a passenger on earth; related in your expectations and hopes to a better world? Are you not ashamed to betray, by your discontent, a spirit so inconsistent with such hopes and expectations, and at the time when you profess to be looking towards the end of your journey, to show so much uneasiness about all the little circumstances of accommodation by the way?——Live by faith, my brethren, and you will live above this world and its discouragements. Dwell with God, and with things divine and immortal, and you shall dwell with true wisdom. You will find nothing so great in worldly events, as either to elate or deject you. Resting upon a principle superior to the world, you will possess your spirits in peace, and will learn that great lesson of heavenly philosophy, *in whatever state you are, therewith to be content.*

SERMON LXXIX.

On drawing near to God.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

PSALM lxxiii. 28.

It is good for me to draw near to God. —

IN this psalm, the pious author describes himself as suffering a great conflict within his mind. His observation of the course of Providence, did not present to him such an order of things as was to have been expected from the justice and goodness of Heaven. The wicked appeared flourishing and triumphant, while the worthy were destitute and oppressed, and much disorder and darkness seemed to prevail in the course of human affairs. Hence his mind fluctuated for a while amidst doubts and fears. His trust in the Divine administration was even so far shaken as to create a suspicion that in *vain he had cleansed his heart, and washed his hands in innocency:* till at last he *went into the sanctuary of God,* and was there taught to view the state of human things in a juster and truer light. He then saw the vanity of that earthly prosperity which bad men appear to enjoy; and the happy issue of all things at the last to the pious and good. He saw the Divine presence ever surrounding them, and though with invisible guidance, yet with unerring hand, bringing

them in the end to glory. His mind returned to tranquillity; and, struck with compunction for his past errors, he rose into those high and memorable expressions of devotion, which we find in the verses preceding the Text. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.* His fixed principle and resolution, upon the whole, he declares in the words of the Text, *It is good for me to draw near to God;* words which will immediately occur to you as particularly suited to the solemn service in which we are to be engaged this day. In discoursing from them, I shall endeavour to show what is implied in *drawing near to God;* and what reason we have to agree with the Psalmist in judging this to be *good for us.*

To *draw near to God,* is an expression of awful and mysterious import; in explaining which, we have much reason to be sober and modest, and to guard with care against every enthusiastic excess; remembering always that, rise as high as we can, an immeasureable and infinite distance must ever remain between us and the Supreme Being. There are two senses in which we may be said to *draw near,* in such a degree as mortality admits, *to God:* either by the general course of a pious and virtuous life; or in solemn acts of immediate devotion.

I. By the practice of holiness and virtue throughout the general tenor of life, we may be said to *draw near to God;* for it is such an approach as we can make to the resemblance of his moral perfections.

After the image of God, man was created. That image was defaced by our sin and apostacy. By a return to God and our duty, that image, through the intervention of our Saviour, is renewed upon the soul; man is said to be regenerated or born again, and is in some degree restored to that connection with God which blessed his primeval state. He who lives in the exercise of good affections, and in the regular discharge of the offices of virtue and piety, maintains, as far as his infirmity allows, conformity with the nature of that perfect Being, whose benevolence, whose purity and rectitude are conspicuous, both in his works and his ways. — Worldly and corrupt men, on the contrary, estrange themselves from all that is Divine. They degrade their nature by unworthy pursuits, and are perpetually sinking in the scale of being. By sensuality they descend to the rank of the brute creation; by malignity, envy, and other bad passions, they connect themselves with devils and infernal spirits. Hence they are said in Scripture to be *alienated from the life of God*; to be *without God in the world*. Though in one sense God is ever near them, as he surrounds and encompasses them on all hands; yet, in a spiritual sense, they are farther removed from him than any distance of space can separate bodies from one another. —— Whereas a virtuous man, whose pleasure it is to do good, and his study to preserve himself upright and pure, is in the course of constant approach towards celestial nature. He is the lover of order, the follower of that righteousness of which God is the author and inspirer. He accords with the great laws of the universe, and seconds the designs of its Almighty Governor. He is, if we may so speak,

in unison with God. Hence piety and virtue are described in Scripture as friendship with God, as introducing us into his family, and rendering us *members of his household.* Strong expressions are used on this subject by the sacred writers; a good man is said *to dwell in God, and God in him.** *If a man love me,* says our Lord, *he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come, and make our abode with him.* †

These high and magnificent views of religion, as an approach to God, may easily satisfy us how much it must be *good for us to draw near to God,* in this sense of the expression. It is visibly the honour and dignity of man to resemble his Creator; and surely his chief happiness will be ever found to lie where his highest dignity and honour are found. *With God is the fountain of life.* With him reside complete beatitude and perfection; and from him are derived all the portions of happiness and comfort, which are any where to be found among the creatures he has made. In exact proportion, therefore, as they approach to, or deviate from him, must the happiness or misery of all rational creatures be. As light and heat flow from the sun as their centre, so bliss and joy flow from the Deity; and as with our distance from that glorious luminary darkness and cold increase; so, according as by alienation of nature we are removed from God, ruin and misery advance in the same degree upon the soul.

Now consider, my brethren, that there is one or other course which you must pursue. If it be not

* 1 John, iii. 24. — iv. 13. † John, xiv. 23.

your study to *draw near to God* by a religious and virtuous life, be assured that you are departing from him; for there is no middle course between sin and righteousness; and let every thinking being seriously reflect what is included in this state of being far from God, and cut off from every kindly influence that descends from heaven. With shadows of pleasure, persons in this unhappy situation may be surrounded and amused; but shadows only, and not realities, they must be, as long as men have no connection with Him who is the origin of all good. Can the stream continue to flow when it is cut off from the fountain? Can the branch flourish when torn away from the stock which gave it nourishment? No more can dependent spirits be happy, when parted from all union with the Father of Spirits and the Fountain of Happiness.

A good man, who is always endeavouring to draw near to God, lives under the smiles of the Almighty. He knows that he is under the protection of that God towards whom he aspires. He can look up to him with pleasing hope; and trust that he shall receive illumination and aid in his progress to perfection. His virtues may as yet be imperfect, and attended with many failings; but his approach towards God is begun. The steps by which he draws near to him may be slow; but that progress is commenced, which in a future state shall be more successfully carried on, and which shall continue to advance through all eternity. *They go on*, says the Psalmist, *from strength to strength; every one of them appeareth before God in Zion.** Hence, by a very beautiful and

* Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

instructive metaphor, the *path of the just* is described in Scripture to be *as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.** It is the dawn of a glorious morning, which increases by degrees to meridian splendour; and as the morning dawn, though dim and feeble, is nevertheless a ray of the same light which forms the brightness of noon-day, we are hereby taught to conceive, that the piety and virtue of good men now, is a degree of celestial nature already imparted to their souls, and differs from its perfection in a higher world, only as the twilight is inferior to noon. The path of the wicked man is directly the reverse of all this. Degraded by his vices, he is constantly declining more and more in a downward course. His path, instead of being as the shining light, is the dusk of evening begun: that darkness of the infernal regions to which his nature is tending, increases upon him gradually, till the shadows of night close upon his head at last, with endless and impenetrable gloom. — Thus fully is verified what the Psalmist had asserted in the verse preceding the text, *Lo! they that are far from thee shall perish;* while his own fixed sentiment he immediately declares — *but it is good for me to draw near to God.* —— I proceed

II. To consider the other sense in which we may be said to draw near to God; that is, in acts of immediate devotion.

There are two ways by which these contribute to bring us near to God. The first is, by their strengthening in the soul that power of vital godliness and

* Prov. iv. 18.

virtue, in which consists our chief resemblance to God; for it is never to be forgotten that all our devotional exercises are subservient to this great end. Herein consists their whole virtue and efficacy, that they purify and improve the soul, raise it above low passions, and thereby promote the elevation of the human nature towards the Divine. When they are considered merely as external services, which we are obliged to perform, but to which we address ourselves with cold and backward hearts; or when the glow of affection which they excite is merely momentary and soon forgotten, they cannot be held to have any influence in bringing us near to God. It is only when they are the service of the heart, when they are the genuine voice of the soul to God, when they serve to kindle those sacred aspirations which continue to breathe throughout the rest of life, that they assist us in rising towards heaven, and alliance with God.

When our acts of devotion are of this nature, they form the other sense in which the words of the text are to be understood. We therein *draw near to God*, as we enter into the most immediate intercourse with him, which the nature of our state admits. In one sense, we cannot be said to be nearer to God at any one time than another; as at all times his presence equally surrounds us; in the fields, as in the temple; in the midst of the world, as much as in the retirement of the closet. But when with serious and devout affections we address ourselves to God, in prayer, and praise, and solemn worship, we then bring home that Divine presence to our feelings, and formally place ourselves in it. We may then be truly said to *draw near to God*: approaching to him through a great

Mediator and Intercessor; sending up those prayers to which we are encouraged to believe that the Almighty is lending a gracious ear; resigning ourselves to his conduct, and offering up our souls to him; exercising, in short, all those acts of faith, love, and trust, which become dependent creatures, towards their Sovereign and Father.

This intellectual correspondence of the heart with our Maker and Redeemer, is termed, in the language of divines, communion with God. And, if there be truth in religion at all; if a Supreme Being exist, who is in any degree accessible to his creatures, and who is gracious to the good, it must be admitted to have a foundation in reason and truth. There must be just ground to think, that the worship of pure and holy hearts is acceptable to him; and the gospel gives us full reason to believe that the energy of his spirit is concerned in stirring up within them the sentiments of devotion.

At the same time it is incumbent on me to warn you, that the satisfaction which on such occasions we feel, must not be grounded merely on a belief which we allow ourselves to entertain, of some communication which we had received directly from God. In the warm and transporting moments of devotion there is always a hazard of our mistaking the exalted efforts of our own imagination, for supernatural impressions from Heaven. It is much safer to judge of the acceptance of our services, by an inference which we can warrantably draw from the state of our hearts and life, compared to God's written word. *To the law and the testimony* we must always have recourse in judging of our state; and then only the *testimony of God's spirit witnesseth with our spirits*

that we are the children of God, when we can discern in ourselves those declared *fruits of the Spirit*, which are *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.**

Carrying along with us this caution, it will be found that, on many accounts, it will be *good for us to draw near to God* in exercises of solemn devotion.

First, it is evidently *good for us*, to discharge those duties of worship, and to give proof of those pious affections, which are unquestionably due from us to our Heavenly Father. If we be wanting in these, we are clearly deficient in one essential part of religion. Morality without piety, constitutes a very imperfect character. It is neither stable in its foundation, nor universal in its influence; and gives us no ground to look for the rewards of those whose *prayers, together with their alms, come up in memorial before God.*

But, besides the obligations from duty which we are laid under to such religious exercises, it can clearly be shown that they are in themselves good for us, on account of the improvement, the satisfaction, and comfort, they enable us to enjoy, in a devout elevation of the heart towards God and celestial objects.

When we reflect on the languor that attends the ordinary circulation of the little occupations of life; on the insipidity of many of its amusements; and the depression of spirits that follows after them; we cannot but be sensible that occasional intercourse with God and Divine things, must furnish a comfortable relief to the mind. It is not, indeed, an inter-

* Galat. v. 22.

course for which we are at all times equal; but neither was the human mind formed to grovel at all times among low cares and objects. It has a demand for something higher and greater than what the common round of the world affords. Hence the extravagant and eccentric pursuits into which we sometimes deviate. We attempt some higher bliss than what we find here. But the attempt which is made by folly, can only be successfully executed by a wise and good man, in the elevation of his soul towards God. Some indeed are sunk so low in worldly gratifications, that nothing has any relish with them, but what either breathes the air of giddy dissipation, or tastes of the impure stream of sensual pleasure. But this vitiated taste, contracted by long corrupt habits, is unnatural in itself, and by proper discipline can be corrected and reformed. Let the mind be restored to its sound and natural state, and its relish for what is more great and noble will return.

Besides the imperfection and emptiness of the ordinary pleasures of the world, many pains and distresses are always mingled with them. No more effectual relief from them can be found than that which may be enjoyed in drawing near to God. Passions corrode the mind. Cares and anxieties fester in it. We are fretted by the ingratitude of friends; soured by the calumnies of enemies; harassed with the competition of rivals. The very bustle and agitation of the world wear out and oppress the mind that longs for tranquillity. In religious retirement, and in those exercises of devotion that bring us near to God, we attain a pleasing region of calm and repose. There, worldly passions are silent; worldly cares are hushed and forgotten. The mind retires

as within itself; and remains alone with God. It is only as far off that the noise and disturbance of the world is heard, like the sound of a distant tumult.

By the perplexity of our worldly concerns, we may have been involved in trouble. By the death of our dearest friends, we may have been overwhelmed with sorrow. By the situation of public affairs, we may be alarmed with dangers that threaten our country. In all such situations is there any consolation equal to that which the devout man enjoys in drawing near to God? He looks up to a Father and a Friend, in whom he can place his trust in every time of need. He hears a voice issuing from the Divine sanctuary, which says, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee. Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.* Comforted by such words, his mind regains tranquillity. Resting on the hope that the God whom he serves will never forsake him, he can dismiss from his thoughts the fears, the troubles, and wickedness of men; and compose his spirit to dwell among celestial things. Looking up to that blessed world where he expects to find his repose, he beholds no objects but what he can contemplate with delight, as great, peaceful, and serene. There, he beholds none of the agitations and turmoils of men; no tumults, nor factions, nor wars; no friends, who die and leave us; no ambitious men, who aspire to oppress; nor violent men, who attempt to destroy; nor fraudulent brethren, who, with a smiling countenance, cheat and deceive. In perfect contrast to the confusion of the earth, he beholds all things above, proceeding in the same perfect order with the heavenly bodies, which move in their orbs with

smooth and steady course. He sees the river of life flowing continually from before the throne of God; and diffusing among the blessed inhabitants *fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.*

From such devout contemplations and hopes arose that great delight which holy men of ancient times describe themselves to have felt in drawing near to God, and which they have expressed in language so vivid and glowing. *Blessed, O Lord, is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee; that he may dwell in thy courts, and be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, and of thy holy place.— O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee. Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Whom have I in Heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire, besides thee.** When such language as this expresses the native sentiments of our hearts, we join ourselves in some measure to the angelical choir above, and anticipate the employments of the blessed.

Some may perhaps imagine, that what has been said of the importance and the advantages of *drawing near to God,* approaches in some degree to mysticism and enthusiasm. I admit, that if religion were represented as consisting wholly of internal devout emotions, the representation of it would be imperfect and false. It is designed to be an active

* Psalm lxiii. 3—6. — lxv. 4. — lxxiii. 25.

principle, regulating the conduct of life, and exerting itself in good works. But very ignorant he must be of human nature, who perceives not, that in order to produce such effects, it is of high importance to engage the affections and the heart on the side of virtue. It is not by reasonings addressed solely to the understanding, that men's characters are formed, or their general conduct actuated. If you wish to work any considerable effect on their life, you must bring over the affections and inclinations to your side. You must not only show them what is right and true, but make them feel what is desirable and good. If you attempt to make religion so very calm and rational, as to exclude from it all warmth of sentiment, all affectionate and devotional feelings, you will leave it in possession of small influence on conduct. *My son, give me thy heart*, is the voice of God; and the voice of reason is, that according as the heart is affected and disposed, such will be the general character and conduct.

The application of the whole subject to the Holy Sacrament, which we are now to celebrate, is natural and obvious. No more solemn opportunity can be afforded us of drawing near to God, than what we there enjoy. All that is encouraging and comforting in Christian faith is set before us, in this most effectual proof of God's mercy to mankind, giving up his Son to the death as a sacrifice for our sins. In celebrating the memorial of this great event, we are placed as under the immediate brightness of heavenly light, and under the warmest ray of Divine love. If there be *any consolation in Christ, any fellowship of the Spirit*, any pleasing hope of eternal life and joy, it ought on such an occasion to be drawn

forth and deeply felt. Let us endeavour to kindle, at the altar of the Lord, that sacred fire, which shall continue to diffuse its vivifying influence over our hearts, when we go abroad into the world, and mingle again in the ordinary concerns of life. We are now to *draw near to God.* Let us draw near to him as our Father; but with that reverence and humility which becomes us on approaching to a Father *who is in Heaven.* Let us draw near through that great Mediator, by whose merits and intercessions alone our services find acceptance at the Divine throne. *No man cometh unto the Father but through him, and none who cometh unto God by him, will be cast out.*

SERMON LXXX.

On Wisdom in Religious Conduct.

Psalm ci. 2.

I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.

Wisdom, says Solomon, *excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.** In our present state, there is no situation in which we can, consistently with safety to ourselves, act thoughtlessly and at random. In whatever enterprise we engage, consideration and prudent thought are requisite to bring it to a good issue. On every occasion there is a right and a wrong in conduct; there is one line of action which is likely to terminate according as we wish; and another, which, for certain, will land us in disappointment. If, in the ordinary transactions of life, we cannot prosper without a due exercise of wisdom and prudence, a higher degree of it is certainly necessary in those momentous parts of conduct which regard our everlasting welfare.

It is indeed confessed, that in religious conduct, the fundamental and most important article is sincerity of heart, and goodness of intention. At the same time, let the intentions be ever so pure and

* Eccles. ii. 13.

sincere, they will be in hazard of falling into some wrong direction, unless they be properly guided by wisdom. Too many instances have appeared of persons who, setting out in life with fair and virtuous purposes, have been so far bewildered by mistaken forms of goodness, as to be betrayed, first into errors, and then into vices and crimes. In order to act our parts with propriety and steadiness, there must be a due proportion of light in the understanding, as well as of warmth and goodness in the heart. The Psalmist was sensible of this when he declares in the text, his resolution, of not only *walking in a perfect*, or upright *way*, but of *behaving himself wisely* in that perfect way. Of the wisdom or prudence which is necessary to guide and support virtue, I purpose to treat in this Discourse. I shall adventure, with great plainness and simplicity of language, to propose some practical rules and directions for that purpose; which may be of service to persons, who with good dispositions and intentions, are beginning the career of life; and which may, perhaps, deserve attention from persons in every period of age.—I begin by observing,

I. That it is most necessary to lay down principles on which we are to form our general conduct. If we set out without principles of any kind, there can be no regular plan of life, nor any firmness in conduct. No person can know where they are to find us; nor on what behaviour of ours they are to depend. If the principles which we pitch upon for determining our course be of a variable nature; such, for instance, as popular opinion, reputation, or worldly interest; as these are often shifting and

changing, they can impart no steadiness or consistency to conduct. Other principles there are, which some affect to adopt, founded on a sense of honour, on the beauty and excellency of virtue, and the dignity of human nature. But however fair these may be in appearance, they will be found ineffectual in many trying situations; unable to repress the violence of contending passions, or to support the heart under many discouragements and sorrows.

The only sure principles we can lay down for regulating our conduct, must be founded on the Christian religion, taken in its whole compass; not confined to the exercises of devotion, nor to the mere morality of social behaviour; but extending to the whole direction of our conduct towards God and towards man. The foundation is to be laid in faith in Christ as the Saviour of the world, through whose merits only we can look for final acceptance with God. We must evince the sincerity of our faith by good works; that is, by a faithful discharge of all the duties incumbent upon us in our several stations of life: continually looking up to Divine grace for assistance in the part assigned us to act; and trusting to that recompence of our present labours, which is promised to the virtuous in a future and better world.—Supposing, that having laid the foundation in such principles, we set forth to act a worthy and virtuous part; resolved that, whatever may befal us, *till we die we will not remove our integrity from us; that our hearts shall not reproach us so long as we live.** I proceed to advise,

* Job, xxvii. 5, 6.

II. That we begin with reforming whatever has been wrong in our former behaviour. This counsel is the more important, because too many, in their endeavours towards reformation, begin with attempting some of the highest virtues, or aspiring to the most sublime performances of devotion, while they suffer their former accustomed evil habits to remain just as they were. This, I apprehend, is beginning at the wrong end. We must first, as the Prophet has exhorted, *put away the evil of our doings from before God's eyes*; we must *cease to do evil, before we learn to do well.** All attempts at reformation of manners are vain, where this is not studied. Let us remember, that as long as the weeds and tares are allowed to remain in the ground, the soil is vitiated by their roots spreading deep and wide; and no good grain will have room to spring up. —— Every man who inspects his own character, may learn that there are certain failings to which, from constitution, circumstances, or long habit, he is prone; termed in Scripture the *sins that most easily beset us.* To discover these, must be his first care; and his first purpose, if he in truth wishes to become a good man, must be gradually to check and finally to extirpate them, of whatever nature they are; whether, perhaps, habits of intemperance, unlawful indulgences of pleasure, indirect methods of acquiring gain, or propensions to malice, resentment, or envy. To overcome those evils when they have become inveterate, to pluck up those thorns by the roots, is perhaps the most difficult part of reformation, and therefore what we are generally the most backward to

* Isaiah, i. 16.

undertake. At the same time it is certain, that as long as, by this tender indulgence to favourite vices, men remain in a divided state between good resolutions and evil habits, they are so far from behaving *wisely in a perfect way*, that they can scarcely be accounted to have entered on that *perfect way*; irresolution will be spread over their conduct; and incoherence will mark their character. — In order to facilitate so necessary a step in the progress towards virtue, let me advise you,

III. To shut up, as much as possible, the avenues which lead to the return of former evil habits. Here is required that exercise of vigilance, self-distrust, and self-denial, which is so often recommended to us in Scripture. There is always some one side on which each of us is more vulnerable than on another. There are places, there are times, there are circumstances, which every man who knows any thing of himself at all, must know will prove the occasions of calling forth his latent frailties, and bringing him into some fatal snare. Then ought that caution of the Apostle to sound in his ears; *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.** Let him not only *walk circumspectly*, but rather altogether fly the dangerous ground: aware of the viper which lurks under the grass, ready to sting. But presumption to flatter ourselves, and to think that we are able to withstand every danger, is a weakness inherent in man. It is on a moderate and humble estimation of our abilities that wisdom directs us to form our conduct. As in civil and political life, he who believes himself equal

* 1 Corinth. x. 12.

to every task, and on all occasions comes forward with rash audacity, is likely to meet with many a humiliation and repulse; so, in moral behaviour, he who, trusting to the strength of his virtuous resolutions, exposes himself inconsiderately to every occasion of temptation, is sure of being often betrayed into evil.

All the various and dangerous avenues to vice, with which, in great cities especially, modern life abounds, it cannot be expected that I am here to point out. Wealth, luxury, and idleness, are the great nourishers of every frailty; the great fomenters of every bad inclination and passion. To the children of Idleness, the haunts of Dissipation open many a wide and inviting gate by night and by day. When within those gates they carelessly enter, surrounded with loose companions, how often does it happen, that from the halls of pleasure and houses of gaming, they come forth as from caverns of destruction, overwhelmed with losses and miseries, and pining with bitter remorse?—Much does it concern every one who seeks to *walk wisely in a perfect way*, to be particularly guarded in the choice of his associates and companions. How often among the gay and the giddy will he meet with those who smile and betray! *He only who walketh with wise men, shall be wise; while the companion of fools shall be destroyed.* * Observe the attention which, in the verses immediately following the text, King David declares himself to have given to this rule of conduct; *I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I will not know a wicked person. Mine eyes shall be on the faithful of the land. He that worketh deceit, shall not dwell within*

* Prov. xiii. 20.

my house. He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my presence. Such was the wisdom that assisted him to continue in a perfect way. — This wisdom requires farther,

IV. That consistency and uniformity be preserved in character; that not by pieces and corners only we study goodness, but that we carry one line of regular virtue through our whole conduct. Without this extensive regulation of behaviour, we can never hold on successfully in a perfect way. Almost all men, even the loose and profligate, lay claim to some one virtue or other, and value themselves on some good moral disposition, which they boast of possessing. It is in vain, therefore, that we rest our character on one or a few estimable qualities, which we imagine ourselves to possess in a high degree, while in other points of virtue we are relaxed and deficient. True virtue must form one complete and entire system. All its parts are connected; piety with morality, charity with justice, benevolence with temperance and fortitude. If any of these parts be wanting, the fabric becomes disjointed; the adverse parts of character correspond not to each other, nor form into one whole. It is only when we *have respect unto all God's commandments*, as the Psalmist speaks, that we have reason *not to be ashamed.*

The apology for many of those breaches of consistency is always at hand, that the transgression is small, and can easily be repaired on a future occasion; and small sins, we imagine, may be compensated by great and distinguished virtues. But no seduction is more dangerous, than this distinction which men are so ready to make between great and small sins. Nothing is more difficult, than to draw the line of

this distinction with any warrantable precision. Wherever inclination gives a strong bias to any indulgence, we may be assured that we shall be always misled in measuring the quantity of guilt. No sin is to be accounted small, by which the dictate of conscience is counteracted, and its authority is weakened and impaired. It may soon draw consequences after it, which will affect our whole conduct. Supposing the matter of these transgressions to be ever so small in its own nature, yet the moral characters of men become stained and bloated by their frequent accumulations; just as many small ulcers, when allowed to form and spread, will grow by degrees into a great disease.——At the same time, when I thus advise you to study entire and consistent virtue, and to guard strictly against small transgressions, let me warn you,

V. Against unnecessary austerity, as forming any part of religious wisdom. This is the meaning of the precept of Solomon, *Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself over-wise; why shouldest thou destroy thyself?* * Too strict and scrupulous, indeed, we cannot be in our adherence to what is matter of clear duty. Every dictate of conscience is to be held sacred, and to be obeyed without reserve. But wisdom requires that we study to have conscience properly enlightened with respect to what really belongs to duty, or infers sin. We must distinguish with care the everlasting commandments of God, from the superstitious fancies and dictates of men. We must never overload conscience with what is frivolous and unnecessary, nor exhaust on trifles,

* Eccles. vii. 16.

that zeal which ought to be reserved for the weightier matters of the law. In all ages, it has been the great characteristic of false pretenders to piety and religion, to arrogate to themselves uncommon sanctity, by affected strictness and severity of manners; paying tithes, like the Pharisees of old, of mint, anise, and cummin, while they overlook righteousness, judgment, and mercy. That religion which is connected with true wisdom, leads to a very different spirit. It will teach us to be neither rigid in trifles, nor relaxed in essentials; not to aim at impracticable heights, nor to fall below the standard of attainable duty; never to make ostentation of our righteousness, nor to set ourselves up as patterns and standards to others, but to be gentle and unassuming; without harshness in our manners, or severity in our censures, when others depart in some particulars from our mode of thinking on religious subjects.

At the same time, we are to remember that, in order to avoid austerity, it by no means follows that we should run into an unlimited compliance with the manners of others around us. This is a danger to which they are often exposed, whose tempers are mild, and whose manners are condescending. In that mixed and various intercourse, which the present state of society forces upon us, few things, indeed, are more difficult, than to ascertain the precise degree of compliance with the world which virtue allows. To preserve a just medium between a formal austerity on the one hand, and that weak and tame facility on the other, which betrays men into many vices, is one of the most important and arduous exercises of religious wisdom. A manly steadiness of conduct, is the object which we are always to keep

in view; studying to unite gentleness of manners with firmness of principle, affable behaviour with untainted integrity.

VI. In order to walk wisely in a perfect way, it is of importance that we study propriety in our actions and general behaviour. There are few precise rules of conduct that can be applied alike to all men. In some of the fundamental virtues, indeed, no circumstances can admit the least variation. There are no situations, for instance, in which truth, justice, and humanity, are not required equally from all. But, in a great number of the duties of life, the manner of discharging them must vary, according to the different ages, characters, and fortunes of men. To suit our behaviour to each of these, to judge of the conduct which is most decent and becoming in our situation, is a material part of wisdom. Without this attention to propriety, virtue will lose much of its grace and efficacy; nay, good dispositions may degenerate into mere weaknesses and follies. The behaviour, for instance, which would be engaging in youth, is unsuitable to advanced years. What is innocent gaiety in the one, becomes culpable levity in the other; and to assume in youth that authority and dignity to which years only give any title, is impertinent affectation. In like manner, to the different ranks of men in society, there belongs a different strain of manners. Whatever is either above or below that line of life in which Providence has placed us, hurts every impartial observer, and suits not the propriety of virtue. What is proper dignity in one station, may, in another, be presumptuous arrogance; and while suitable dependence belongs

to those of inferior rank, it ought not to sink into a degrading servility. With a change in the situation of our fortunes, our duties obviously change. What was commendable frugality in one condition, may become sordid parsimony as our estate rises; and the generosity required of the affluent, turns into extravagance and injustice when our circumstances are impaired. — In all those attentions to propriety some regard will, of course, be had to the opinions which the world forms of us. No man has a title to despise altogether what the world thinks, and what it expects from him. But this regard to the sentiments of others, must never go so far as to encroach on what a man's own conscience tells him, it is his duty either to do, or to forbear doing. In the scale by which we measure the propriety of our conduct, the opinion of the world must never be the preponderating weight. — Let me recommend,

VII. The observance of order and regularity in the whole of conduct.* This may, at first appearance, seem an article of inferior importance, and hardly deserving to be ranked among moral duties. But I am persuaded that it is more nearly connected with virtue, than many persons imagine; and that it maintains an important place in that wisdom which directs a perfect way. If ever you mean to carry a consistent line of virtue throughout your conduct, you must allot to every transaction its place and its season. Hurry and tumult, disorder and confusion, are both the characteristics of vice and the parents of it. Let your time be regularly distributed, and all your affairs

* Vide on this subject, Vol. i. Serm. XVI.

be arranged with propriety, in method and train. Thus, and thus only, can you be masters of yourselves; your time and your life will be your own; and what is serious and important, will not be justled out of its place, by that crowd of inferior cares, which are for ever pressing on the disorderly, and frustrating the plans which they had formed for the wise and proper regulation of life. — Consider, too, that, if order be not studied, there can be no prudent economy in the management of your fortune and worldly affairs; and economy, be assured, is a great guardian of all the private and domestic virtues. When order and economy are neglected, you are in hazard of being first involved in distresses, and then inveigled into crimes; whereas, under the direction of regular conduct, both your worldly and your religious concerns will be more in the course of prospering. — I have now only to add,

VIII. That we should give attention to all the auxiliary means which religion offers for assisting and guiding us to walk wisely in a perfect way. These open a large field to the care of every good man. We must always remember that virtue is not a plant which will spontaneously grow up and flourish in the human heart. The soil is far from being so favourable to it; many shoots of an adverse nature are ever springing up, and much preparation and culture are required for cherishing the good seed, and raising it to full maturity. — Among the means, for this purpose, let me first mention the serious reading of the Holy Scripture. That sacred book, as the standard of our belief and practice, claims, on every account, our frequent perusal. In the New Testament, the

brightest display of our Lord's energetic example, joined with his simple, affecting, and instructive discourses, illustrated by the writings of his inspired followers: in the Old Testament, the variety of matter, the ardent glow of devotion in some parts, and the mysterious sublimity of others; all conspire to affect the mind with serious and solemn emotions. Passages impressed on the memory from those sacred volumes, have often, from their recurrence, had a happy effect. In our early years, most of us were accustomed to look with respect upon those venerable records; and woe be to them, who, looking back upon the days of their father's house, can trample with scorn on the memory of those whose pious cares were employed in forming them to good principles, and teaching them to reverence the word of God! —— Let me next recommend a serious regard to all the established means of religious instruction; such as, attending regularly the preaching of the word, partaking frequently of the Holy Sacrament, and preserving a sacred reverence for the Lord's day. Whenever all regard to the Lord's day becomes abolished; when on it we are allowed to mingle without any distinction in our common affairs, and even in our ordinary diversions and amusements, we may account this a certain symptom of declining virtue, and of approaching general immorality. We have beheld in a neighbouring kingdom, how fatally it proved the forerunner of an entire dissolution both of moral and civil order in society. Whatever disregard certain modern refiners of morality may attempt to throw on all the instituted means of public religion, assuredly they must, in their lowest view, be considered as the outguards and fences of virtuous

conduct; and even in this view must deserve the esteem and respect of all good men. We know and are often enough told, that the *form of godliness* may subsist without the *power* of it. But depend upon it, wherever *the form of godliness* is entirely gone, the ruin of its *power* is not far off. Whoever has studied the human mind, may soon be satisfied of this truth.

Besides attention to the public means of religious improvement, much will depend on our own private exercises of devotion and serious thought. Prayer, in particular, operates to our high advantage, both by the immediate assistance which we may hope it will procure from Him who is the author and inspirer of virtue, and by its native influence in softening, purifying, and exalting the heart. In vain would he attempt to behave himself wisely in a perfect way, who looks not frequently up to God for grace and aid; and who would presumptuously attempt to separate moral virtue from devotion, its natural and original ally. Besides the exercises of religious worship, both public and private, seasonable returns of retirement from the world, of calm recollection and serious thought, are most important auxiliaries to virtue. He who is without intermission engaged in the bustle of society and worldly occupation, becomes incapable of exercising that discipline over himself, and giving that attention to his temper and character which virtue requires. *Commune with your own hearts on your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.**

By the observance of such rules and maxims as

* Psalm iv. 4, 5.

have been now pointed out, it may be hoped, that through Divine grace, we may be enabled to *behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way*, until, in the end, we receive the reward of such behaviour. The wisdom here spoken of, as conjoined with virtue, is that *wisdom from above*, which is appointed by God to enlighten and guide the course of integrity. It opens to us that *path of the just*, which is now as *the shining light*, and which will *shine more and more until the perfect day*.

SERMON LXXXI.

On the IMMORTALITY of the SOUL, and a FUTURE STATE.

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2 CORINTHIANS, v. 1.

For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

THIS passage presents to us in one view the nature of our present earthly state, and the future object of the Christian's hope. The style is figurative; but the figures employed are both obvious and expressive. The body is represented as a house inhabited by the soul, or the thinking part of man. But it is an *earthly house*, a *tabernacle* erected only for passing accommodation, and *to be dissolved;* to which is to succeed the future dwelling of the just in *a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* Here then are three great objects presented to our consideration. First, the nature of our present condition. Secondly, that succeeding state which is the object of good men's hope. Thirdly, the certain foundation of their *hope; we know,* that if our *earthly house be dissolved, we have a building of God.*

I. THE text gives a full description of our present embodied state; as an *earthly house,* an *earthly house of this tabernacle,* and a tabernacle which is to be *dissolved.*

We dwell in an *earthly house*. Within this cottage of earth is lodged that spiritual, immortal substance, into which God breathed the breath of life. So we are elsewhere said in Scripture, to have *our foundation in the dust*, and to *dwell in houses of clay*. During its continuance in this humble abode, the soul may be justly considered as confined and imprisoned. It is restrained from the full exertion of its powers by many obstructions. It can perceive and act only by very imperfect organs. It looks abroad as through the windows of the senses; and beholds truth as *through a glass darkly*. It is beset with a numerous train of temptations to evil, which arise from bodily appetites. It is obliged to sympathise with the body in its wants; and is depressed with infirmities not its own. For it suffers from the frailty of those materials of which its earthly house is compacted. It languishes and droops along with the body; is wounded by its pains; and the slightest discomposure of bodily organs is sufficient to derange some of the highest operations of the soul.

All these circumstances bear the marks of a fallen and degraded state of human nature. The mansion in which the soul is lodged corresponds so little with the powers and capacities of a rational immortal spirit, as gives us reason to think that the souls of good men were not designed to remain always thus confined. Such a state was calculated for answering the ends proposed by our condition of trial and probation in this life, but was not intended to be lasting and final. Accordingly, the Apostle, in his description, calls it the earthly house *of this tabernacle*; alluding to a wayfaring or sojourning state, where tabernacles or tents are occasionally erected for the

accommodation of passengers. The same metaphor is here made use of, which is employed in several other passages of Scripture, where we are said to be *strangers and sojourners on earth before God, as were all our fathers.* This earth may be compared to a wide field spread with tents, where troops of pilgrims appear in succession and pass away. They enter for a little into the tents prepared for them; and remain there to undergo their appointed probation. When that is finished, their tents are taken down, and they retire to make way for others who come forward in their allotted order. Thus *one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh;* and the *earthly house* is to all no other than the *house of their pilgrimage.**

The *earthly house of this tabernacle,* the Apostle, proceeding in his description, tells us, is *to be dissolved.* Close as the union between the soul and body now appears to be, it is no more than a temporary union. It subsists only during the continuance of a tabernacle of dust, which, by its nature, is tending towards ruin. The *dust must* soon *return to the dust, and the spirit to God who gave it.* —— The dissolution of the *earthly house of this tabernacle,* is an event full of dismay to wicked men. Beyond that period they see nothing but a dark unknown, which, as far as they can discern, is peopled with objects full of terror; even to the just, this dissolution is a serious and awful event. Providence has wisely appointed that, burdened as our present state is with various ills and frailties, we should, however, be naturally attached to it. Its final close is always attended with several melancholy ideas. — Thou who now flourishest most in health and strength, must

* Psalm cxix. 54.

then have thy head laid low. From thy closing eyes the light of the sun shall disappear for ever. That light shall continue to shine, the seasons to return, and the earth to flourish; but to thee no more, separated from the dwellings of men, and cut off from all thou wert accustomed to love, as though thou hadst never been.—Such is the fate of man considered merely as mortal; as dwelling in an earthly house which is about to be dissolved. The consolatory corrective of those humbling ideas, the ray that is to dissipate this gloom, we behold in the subsequent part of the text; that when this earthly house is dissolved, there is prepared for the righteous *a building of God, an house not made with hands.* But before proceeding to this part of the subject, let us pause for a little, and make some reflections on what has been already said.

Let the distinction between the soul and the body, which is so clearly marked in the text, be deeply imprinted on our minds. Few things in religion or morals are entitled to make a stronger impression than this distinction; and yet, with the bulk of men the impression it makes appears to be slight. They seem to think and act as if they consisted of no more than mere flesh and blood, and had no other concerns than what respect their embodied state. If their health be firm, if their senses be gratified, and their appetites indulged, all is well with them. Is not this to forget that the body is no more than an *earthly house* or *tabernacle* of the soul? The soul, that thinking part which they feel within them, and which it is impossible for them to confound with their flesh or their bones, is certainly far nobler than the tenement of clay which it inhabits. The soul is the prin-

ciple of all life, and knowledge, and action. The body is no more than its instrument or organ; and as much nobler as is the part which belongs to him who employs an instrument, than to the instrument which is employed, so much is the soul of greater dignity than the body. The one is only a frail and perishable machine; the other survives its ruin, and lives for ever. —— During the time that the union continues between those two very different parts of our frame, I by no means say that it is incumbent upon us to disregard all that relates to the body. It is not possible, nor though it were possible, would it be requisite or fit, for a man to act as if he were pure immaterial spirit. This is what the condition and laws of our nature permit not. — But must not the greatest sensualist admit, that if the soul be the chief part of man, it must have interests of its own, which require to be carefully attended to? Can he imagine that he truly consults either his interest or his pleasure, if he employs the thinking part of his nature only to serve, and to administer to the bodily part? Must not this infer, not merely a degradation of the superior part, but an entire perversion of that whole constitution of nature which our Maker hath given us? Be assured, my brethren, that the soul hath a health and a sickness, hath pleasures and pains of its own, quite distinct from those of the body, and which have a powerful influence on the happiness or misery of man. He who pays no attention to these, and neglects all care of preserving the health and soundness of his soul, is not only preparing final misery for himself when he shall enter into a disembodied estate, but is laying, even for his present state, the foundation of many a bitter distress. By folly and guilt he is *wounding his spirit*. Its

wounds will often bleed when his body appears sound, and will give rise to inward pangs, which no animal comforts shall be able to assuage or heal.

When we impress our minds with the sense of this important distinction between the body and the soul, let us not forget, that closely united as they now are in our frame, their union is soon to terminate. *The earthly house of this tabernacle is to be dissolved;* but the soul which inhabits it remains. Let us therefore dwell in our earthly house with the sentiments of those who know they are about to dislodge. The endowments and improvements of the soul are the only possessions on which we can reckon as continuing to be our own. On every possession which belongs to our bodily estate, we ought to view this inscription as written by God; "This is an earthly "house which is tottering to its fall; This is a taber-"nacle which is about to be taken down." ——Let us with pleasure turn our thoughts towards those higher prospects that are set before us, when this change shall have taken place in the human condition; which naturally brings us to the

IId Head of discourse, — the great object of the hope of good men in a succeeding state. *The earthly house* is contrasted by the Apostle with a *building of God; an house not made with hands;* and *the tabernacle which is to be dissolved,* with a *house eternal in the heavens.*

The expressions here employed to signify what is promised to the righteous, *a building of God, an house not made with hands,* are expressions of a mysterious import. They suggest to us things which we cannot now conceive, far less describe. Into that house

which is above, those habitations of eternity, no living man has entered, to explore them, and to report to us tidings of what he there beheld. A sacred veil conceals the mansions of glory. But, in general, these expressions of the text plainly import that the spirits of good men shall, upon death, be translated from an imperfect to a glorious state. Whether we explain *the building of God, the house not made with hands*, to signify the incorruptible bodies which the just shall animate at the resurrection, or the habitations of celestial glory into which they enter, they are terms which convey ideas of high magnificence and felicity. This earth on which we dwell, is no more than an exterior region of the great kingdom of God. It is but an entrance, through which, after suitable preparation, we pass into the palace of an Almighty Sovereign. Admitted there, we may hope to behold far greater objects than we now can behold; and to enjoy in perfection those pleasures which we here view from afar, and pursue in vain. Such degrees of pleasure are allowed us at present as our state admits. But a state of trial required that pains should be intermixed with our pleasures, and that infirmity and distress should often be felt. The remains of our fall appear every where in our condition. The ruins of human nature present themselves on all hands. But *when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.* With the fall of the earthly house, all its rotten and corruptible materials shall disappear. *It is sown in corruption*, says the Apostle, speaking of the happy change made upon good men at the resurrection, *it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;*

*it is sown a natural, it is raised a spiritual body: —for this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality.** —— Into that *house not made with hands, that building of God,* we have every reason to believe that there will be no room for such guests to intrude as care or sorrow. Nothing can be admitted to enter there, but what contributes to the felicity of those whom the Almighty hath allowed to dwell in his presence, and to *behold his face in righteousness.*

Besides the glory and perfection of this future state, the text suggests its permanency. This house *not made with hands,* is *a house eternal in the heavens.* The tabernacle which we now inhabit, is every moment liable to fall: above is the fixed mansion, the seat of perpetual rest. Beyond doubt, the certain prospect of death renders every thing inconsiderable which we here possess. Every enjoyment is saddened when we think of its end approaching. We become sensible that we are always building on sand, never on a rock. Fluctuation and change characterise all that is around us; and at the moment when our attachment to any persons or objects is become the strongest, they are beginning to slide away from our hold. But in the mansions above, alteration and decay are unknown. Every thing there continues in a steady course. No schemes are there begun and left unfinished; no pleasing connections just formed, and then broken off. The treasures possessed there shall never be diminished; the friends we enjoy there shall never die, and leave us to mourn. In those celestial regions, shines the sun that never sets; the calm reigns which is never disturbed; the

* 1 Corinth. xv. 42—52.

river of life flows with a stream, which is always unruffled in its course.

Such are the prospects, imperfectly as we can now conceive them, which are set forth to good men in a future world. But how, it may be asked, shall we be satisfied that such prospects are not mere illusions with which our fancy flatters us? Upon what foundations rests this mighty edifice of hope, which the Apostle here rears up for the consolation of Christians, and of which he speaks so confidently as to say, *We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God?* — To inquire into this was the

IIId proposed Head of Discourse, to which we now proceed. And as the subject is in itself so important, and so pleasing to all good men, I shall take a view of the different kinds of evidence, upon which our faith of a happy immortality is grounded.

We must observe, in the first place, that the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle at death, affords no ground for thinking that the soul at the same time perishes, or is extinguished. I begin with this observation, because the strongest prejudices against the soul's immortality, arise from what is sometimes found to happen at that period. The soul and the body are at present united by the closest sympathy. When one suffers, the other is affected. Both seem to grow up together to the maturity of their powers; and together both seem often to decay. Such a shock is apparently suffered by the soul at death, as at first view might lead us to suspect that it was sharing the same fate with the body. Notwithstanding this, there are clear proofs that the body and the soul,

though at present closely connected by Divine appointment with one another, are, however, substances of different and dissimilar natures. Matter, of which the body is composed, is a substance, altogether dead and passive, and cannot be put in motion without some external impulse. Whereas the soul hath within itself a principle of motion, activity, and life. Between the laws of matter, and the action of thought, there is so little resemblance, or rather so much opposition, that mankind in general have agreed in holding the soul to be an immaterial substance; that is, a substance the nature of which we cannot explain or define farther than that it is a substance quite distinct from matter. This being once admitted, it clearly follows, that since thought depends not on matter, from the dissolution of the material part we have no ground to infer the destruction of the thinking part of man. As long as by the ordination of the Creator these different substances remain united, there is no wonder that the one should suffer from the disorder or indisposition of the other.

It is so far from following that the soul must cease to act on the dissolution of the body, that it seems rather to follow, that it will then act in a more perfect manner. In its present habitation, it is plainly limited and confined in its operations. When it is let loose from that earthly house, it is brought forth into greater liberty. To illustrate this by an instance which may be conceived as analogous: let us suppose a person shut up in an apartment, where he saw light only through some small windows. If these windows were foul or dimmed, he would see less: if they were altogether darkened, he could see none at all. But were he let out from this

confinement into the open air, he would be so far from being deprived of sight, that though at first overpowered by a sudden glare, he would soon see around him much more completely than before. The senses are as so many windows or apertures, through which the soul at present exercises its powers of perception. If the senses are disordered, the powers of the soul will be obstructed. But once separated from its earthly tenement, the soul will then exercise its powers without obstruction; will act with greater liberty, and in a wider sphere.——I admit this argument only goes as far as to show, that although the body perish, there remains with the soul a capacity for separate existence. Whether that existence shall be actually continued to it after death, must depend on the will of Him who gave it life, and who certainly at his pleasure can take that life away. It is necessary, therefore, to inquire into what we have any reason to believe, may be the intention of our Creator concerning a future life.

I ARGUE then, in the next place, that if the soul were to perish when the body dies, the state of man would be altogether unsuitable to the wisdom and perfection of the Author of his being. Man would be the only creature that would seem to have been made in vain. All the other works of God are contrived to answer exactly the purposes for which they were made. They are either incapable of knowledge at all; or, they know nothing higher than the state in which they are placed. Their powers are perfectly suited and adjusted to their condition. But it is not so with man. He has every appearance of being framed for something higher and greater than what he here

attains. He sees the narrow bounds within which he is here confined; knows and laments all the imperfections of his present state. His thirst for knowledge, his desires of happiness, all stretch beyond his earthly station. He searches in vain for adequate objects to gratify him. His nature is perpetually tending and aspiring towards the enjoyment of some more complete felicity than this world can afford. In the midst of all his searches and aspirations, he is suddenly cut off. He is but of yesterday, and to-morrow is gone. Often in the entrance, often in the bloom of life, when he had just begun to act his part, and to expand his powers, darkness is made to cover him. — Can we believe, that when this period is come, all is finally over with the best and the worthiest of mankind? Endowed with so noble an apparatus of rational powers, taught to form high views and enlarged desires, were they brought forth for no other purpose, than to breathe this gross and impure air for a short space, and then to be cut off from all existence? All his other works, God hath made in *weight, number, and measure*; the hand of the Almighty artificer every where appears. But on man, his chief work here below, he would, upon this supposition, appear to have bestowed no attention; and after having erected a stately palace in this universe, framed with so much magnificence, and decorated with so much beauty, to have introduced man, in the guise of a neglected wanderer, to become its inhabitant.

Let us farther consider the confused and promiscuous distribution of good and evil in this life. The enjoyments of the world, such as they are, are far from being always bestowed on the virtuous and the worthy. On the contrary, the bitterest

portion is often their lot. In the midst of infirmities, diseases, and sorrows, they are left to drag their life, while ease and affluence are allowed to the ungodly. — I must ask, if such an arrangement of things, owing to the ordination, or at least, to the permission of Providence, be consonant to any ideas we can form of the wisdom and goodness of a Supreme Ruler, on the supposition of there being no future state? — But as soon as the immortality of the soul, and a state of future retribution are established, all difficulties vanish; the mystery is unravelled; supreme wisdom, justice, and goodness, are discovered to be only concealed for a little while behind the curtain. If that curtain were never to be withdrawn and immortality never to appear, the ways of God would be utterly inexplicable to man. We would be obliged to conclude that either a God did not exist; or, though he existed, that he was not possessed of such perfections as we now ascribe to him, if when a worthy and pious man had spent his whole life in virtuous deeds, and perhaps had died a martyr to the cause of religion and truth; he should, after long and severe sufferings, perish finally, unrewarded and forgotten; no attention shown to him by the Almighty; no *building of God* erected for him; no *house eternal* prepared in the Heavens!

These reasonings are much strengthened by the belief that has ever prevailed among all mankind, of the soul's immortality. It is not an opinion that took its rise from the thin-spun speculations of some abstract philosophers. Never has any nation been discovered on the face of the earth so rude and barbarous, that in midst of their wildest superstitions

there was not cherished among them some expectations of a state after death, in which the virtuous were to enjoy happiness. So universal a consent in this belief affords just ground to ascribe it to some inmate principle implanted by God in the human breast. Had it no foundation in truth, we must suppose that the Creator found it necessary, for the purposes of his government, to carry on a principle of universal deception among his rational subjects. Many of the strongest passions of our nature are made to have a clear reference to a future existence of the soul. The love of fame, the ardent concern which so often prevails about futurity, all allude to somewhat in which men suppose themselves to be personally concerned, after death. The consciences both of the good and the bad, bear witness to a world that is to come. Seldom do men leave this world without some fears or hopes respecting it; some secret anticipations and presages of what is hereafter to befal them.

But though the reasonings which have been adduced to prove the immortality of the soul and a future state, are certainly of great weight, yet reasonings still they are, and no more, and in every human reasoning, suspicions may arise of some fallacy or error. In a point so momentous to us, as our existence after death, we never could, with absolute certainty, and full satisfaction, have rested on any evidence except what was confirmed by the declaration of God himself. — For many and high blessings we are indebted to the Christian revelation; for none more than for its having *brought life and immortality to light.* The revelations made by God to the world in early ages, gave the first openings to this

great article of faith and hope. In future periods the light dawned more and more; but it was not until the sun of righteousness arose by the appearance of Christ on earth, that the great discovery was completed. Then, indeed, were made known the *city of the living God, the new Jerusalem* above, the *mansions* prepared for the *spirits of just men made perfect.* Nor was a state of future felicity only proclaimed by Christ and his apostles to good men, but was represented as purchased for them by the death of their Redeemer. *I give,* he was authorised to say, *unto my sheep eternal life. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.** Accordingly, he lay down in the grave; rose as the *first fruits of them that slept;* and ascending into Heaven, entered there within the veil, as the *forerunner* of his followers, to assure them of all being friendly and well-disposed towards them in those upper regions. All therefore who live and die in the faith and obedience of Jesus, are entitled to say with the apostle, *we know;* not only we hope and we reason, but *we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.*

The first and most natural improvement of all that has been said, is to produce in our hearts the most lasting gratitude, love, and reverence, towards that great Benefactor of mankind, who not only hath made known and published the blessings of a future state to the righteous, but by his great undertaking for their redemption hath erected in their behalf the

* John, x. 28. — xiv. 2.

house eternal in the heavens. —— The next improvement we should make, is to conduct our own life and behaviour as becomes those who have an interest in this happiness and this hope. From such persons assuredly is to be expected a pure, correct, and dignified behaviour in every situation; not a contempt of the employments, nor a renunciation of all the comforts of their present life. Opinions that produce such effects are connected only with the spirit of superstition and false religion. But to them it belongs, in the midst of the affairs, enticements, and temptations of the world, to regulate their conduct as becomes the heirs of a Divine inheritance; never debasing themselves among what is mean, nor defiling themselves with what is corrupt in the present state; but serving God with that fidelity, and behaving to men with that steady magnanimity of virtue, that generous beneficence and humanity, which suits immortal beings, who are aspiring to rise in a future state to the perfection of their nature, in the presence of God.

SERMON LXXXII.

On overcoming Evil with Good.

ROMANS, xii. 21.

Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.

IN this world we all know that we must reckon upon a mixture of goods and evils. Some of the evils are owing to the appointment of Providence in this state of trial; many of them are the fruits of our own guilt and misconduct. The goods and the evils of our state are so blended, as often to render the whole of human life a struggle between them. We have to contend both with the evils of fortune, and with the evils of our own depravity, and it is only he who can in some measure overcome both, that is to be esteemed the wise, the virtuous, and the happy man. At the same time, amidst the evils of different kinds which assault us, there is a principle of good derived from Heaven, by which we may hope to acquire strength, and through Divine assistance be enabled to overcome the evils of our state. This is the subject of the exhortation in the text, *Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.* Taken in its most extensive sense, as respecting the different kinds of evil, which we have to overcome, the exhortation may be understood to comprise the three following particulars. In the first place, Be not overcome by

the injuries you meet with in the world, so as to pursue revenge. Secondly, Be not overcome by the disasters of the world, so as to sink into despair. Thirdly, Be not overcome by the evil examples of the world, so as to follow them into sin. But in all those cases, *overcome evil with good.* Overcome injuries, by forgiveness. Overcome disasters, by fortitude. Overcome evil examples, by firmness of principle.

I. Be not overcome by the injuries you meet with in the world, so as to pursue revenge. It appears from the context, that this was the primary object which the Apostle had in his view in this exhortation. He refers to the injuries which the primitive Christians were constantly suffering from their persecutors. Instead of being so much overcome by these as to be intent on revenge, his exhortation in the verses preceding the Text is, *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* But it is not in times only of persecution and general distress, that this exhortation is needful. We must in every state of society reckon upon meeting with unreasonable men, and encountering their bad usage. This is one of the evils inseparable from our present state. No station is so high, no worth so distinguished, no innocence so inoffensive, as to secure us entirely against it. Sometimes the violence of enemies, sometimes the ingratitude of friends, will ruffle our

spirits. Where we think that we have merited praise, we will be in hazard of meeting reproach. Envy will rise unprovoked; and calumny, from its secret place, will dart its envenomed shafts against the most deserving. Such is the consequence of the present depravity of our nature, and of the disordered state in which human affairs lie. —— The fondness of self-love is always apt to amuse us with too flattering prospects of what life is to produce for us, beyond what it produces for others. Hence our impatience and irritation upon every injury we suffer; as if some new and unheard-of thing had befallen us; and as if we alone were privileged to pass through the world, untouched by any wrong. Whereas, if we were disciplined to think of the world, and of the tempers of those around us, as a wise man ought to think, the edge of this impatience would be taken off. When we engage in any undertaking, we ought to say to ourselves, that in the course of it we will have to do, more or less, with selfish, crafty, unprincipled men. These men will naturally act as their evil nature prompts them. They are the thorns and brambles that we must expect to encumber and to gall us in many of the paths of life. We must not hope to *reap grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles.* Wild dogs will naturally bark; and beasts of prey naturally seek to devour.

Now, when thus situated, how are we to act for overcoming the evils we have already endured, or are in hazard of still farther enduring from others? To provide for safety and defence, is unquestionably allowable and wise. But are we also to lay plans for future revenge? — Were this the course to be followed, what would the consequence be, but to

render the life of man a state of constant hostility, where provocations and resentments, injuries and retaliations, would succeed one another without end; till the world became like a den of wild beasts, perpetually attacking and devouring one another? No, says the Apostle, *overcome evil with good.* Disarm and overcome your enemies, by forgiveness and generosity. This is the principle of *good*, which you are to oppose to their *evil.* Teach them thereby, if not to love, at least to honour and respect you. While you take proper precautions for present safety, provide for the future, not by studied plans of revenge, but by fortitude of mind, by prudent behaviour, and superior virtue. Herein you show no unmanly tameness or cowardice. Religion means not to suppress the proper feelings of honour, nor the sense which every man ought to have of dignity of character, and the rights which belong to him. These may be supported to the full, without a mean thirst for revenge, and a fierce desire of returning evil for evil.

By the magnanimity of forgiveness, you gain an important victory in overcoming, not perhaps your enemy, but your own wrathful and violent passions. Whereas he, who in such conjunctures knows no other method of proceeding, but that of gratifying resentment, is, in truth, the person who is overcome. For he has put it in the power of his enemy to overthrow his repose, and to gall and embitter his mind. By forgiving and despising injuries, you assume a superiority over your adversary, which he will be obliged to feel. Whereas, if you allow his provocations to blow you up into fierce revenge, you have given him the advantage. You confess yourself hurt and sore. His evil has overcome your good. He

has fixed a dart within you, which in vain you endeavour to pull out; and by the attempts you make, you only exasperate and inflame the sore. Seldom is there any punishment which revenge can inflict, more severe than is suffered by him who inflicts it. The bitterness of spirit, the boilings of fierce passions, joined with all the black ideas which the cruel plans of revenge excite, produce more acute sensations of torment, than any that are occasioned by bodily pain. —— When bad men have behaved injuriously toward us, let us leave them to themselves, and they will be sufficiently punished by their own vices. Their wickedness is no reason why we should render ourselves unhappy, or afford them the gratification of having it in their power to deprive us of peace. — I shall only add farther on this head, that a passion for revenge has been always held to be the characteristic of a little and mean mind. Never was any man distinguished as a hero, or recorded in the annals of history as a great man, to whom this quality of generous forgiveness of evil did not conspicuously belong. We know how eminently it shone in the character of Him whom we justly venerate as the model of all perfection; whose dying breath was employed in apologizing and praying for those who were shedding his blood.

II. Be not overcome by the misfortunes of life, so as to sink into despair. This is another view of that *evil* which we are called upon to *overcome by good;* and is the sense in which *evil* is most generally understood, and is most dreaded by men. Although by inoffensive and blameless behaviour we should escape, in a great degree, from the injuries of bad men; yet,

to escape altogether from the stroke of misfortune and distress, is what none of us can expect. In one way or other, in our person, or fortune, or families and friends, it is the doom of all, more or less, to suffer. From what causes this appointment of Providence arises, and to what purposes it is rendered subservient, it belongs not to our subject at present to inquire; the fact is too certain and obvious. —— The principle of good which we must oppose to those evils of our lot, and by means of which we may hope to overcome them, is inward fortitude grounded on religion and trust in God; forming that state of mind, which, resting on itself, and the witness of a good conscience, rises superior to the trials of the world.

When the sky begins to lour around thee; when thy gay prospects begin to disappear, thy friends to fail, or thy fortune to decline; or when, as years advance, the chief comforts on which thy heart was set, and on which thou hadst conceived thy happiness to depend, are unexpectedly cut off; say not then within thyself, "The evil time has now overtaken "me; the gates of hope are all shut: the days are "come wherein I shall have no pleasure; enjoyment "is fled; nothing remains for me now, but to close "my days in melancholy, to despair, and to die." — This is to be *overcome of evil* indeed. He who thus allows himself to sink under the misfortunes of life, dishonours the character of a man, still more that of a Christian. He shows that whatever plausible appearances he may at former times have made before the world, at bottom he not only wanted strength and firmness of mind, but was deficient also in religious faith and principle. For it is impossible

that he who allows himself to be so entirely overcome by the evils of the world, can entertain just notions of God, and of his government of the world. He hath cast aside all reliance on Providence, and set at nought the promises of the Gospel. He may suppress all outward expressions of impious discontent; he may even affect the language of resignation; but his heart in secret will murmur and repine against the Lord.

These, therefore, are the occasions when it particularly behoves us to call to mind all those principles which should assist us so to possess our minds in patience, as to overcome evil with good. —— Recal, my brethren, all the former experience you have had of the goodness of the Almighty, and the ground which this affords for trust and hope in him now. Recal to remembrance all the promises he has made to good men; as the words of Him *who changes not;* who *is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent.* Recollect the general tenour of that Providence, whose course it has ever been, since the creation of the world, so to chequer the life of men with unforeseen vicissitudes, as often to make unexpected goods succeed evils; nay, to make them spring from evils. Recollect, that whatever fortune may rob you of, it cannot take away what is most valuable, the peace of a good conscience, the pleasing sense of having acted honourably and done your duty, and the cheering prospect of a happy conclusion to all the trials of life in a better world. Consider that, as long as virtue remains, there are always, even in the most unfavourable situations, some comforts still left open, did we not overlook them. For it is seldom or never that all good things forsake a

man at once, and all evils overtake him together. If he is bereaved of some friends whom he tenderly loved, there are others yet remaining to whom he may look for comfort. If, by infirmity, or old age, he be excluded from the enjoyments of active life, the gratifications which leisure and repose afford, are still left to him. If his fortune be shattered, and poverty threaten to beset him, yet, even in very straitened circumstances, many of the simple and best pleasures of nature, and many of the satisfactions of social life, can still be enjoyed. Nay, the mind of a good man can still be a kingdom to itself; and though confined in a prison, or stretched on a sick bed, peaceful and pleasing thoughts will occasionally arise to him, and fair prospects of futurity will present themselves to his view.

Assisted by such considerations as these, let us enliven faith, strengthen patience, and animate hope, till we be enabled to *overcome evil with good:* always looking forward to better days; nourishing trust in the gracious government of the universe; and listening to him who hath said of old, and who still says to all his servants, *Fear not, for I am with thee; be not afraid, for I am thy God. Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee; wait on the Lord, be of good courage; and he shall strengthen your hearts, all ye that wait upon the Lord.*

III. Be not overcome by the evil examples of the world, so as to follow them into sin. This undoubtedly is one of the most dangerous evils which good men are called to overcome; and where it is most difficult to gain the victory. He who, in the former instances that have been mentioned, can *overcome evil*

with good; who can generously forgive injuries, and magnanimously bear up under misfortunes, will be often in hazard of being overcome by evil, under this form. After having maintained his ground against many a rough blast, he may be in danger of being betrayed by a flattering gale in the days of his ease and prosperity; of being insensibly carried down the stream by that multitude of evil-doers who surround and deceive him. For the character of *the world* too certainly is, that it *lieth in wickedness.* Fashions of vice may change with the times. In one age, one set of corrupt habits may prevail; and in another, the passions of men may take a different turn. But, in every age, the multitude of men will be prone to indulge vicious desires. On the surface of behaviour, vice may be disguised under a plausible and polished appearance, while at bottom there lies the poisoned root of evil. Pleasure will ever captivate the young and unthinking. Riches and advancement ensnare the more sober and stayed. Attached to their different pursuits, and connecting with them the ideas of wisdom and importance, the multitude will ridicule those who go not along with them, as formal and precise, as raw, uneducated, and ignorant of the world. Assailed by such reproaches, the timid become afraid; the modest are abashed; the complaisant and good-natured submit to their supposed friends. They begin to imagine that the general opinion of the world cannot but have some reason on its side; and, half seduced by persuasion, half compelled by ridicule, they surrender their former convictions, and consent to live as they see others around them living.

Such are the evils which we must study to over-

come by good, if we wish to be esteemed either honourable men, or faithful Christians. And how are we to overcome them? *This is the victory*, says the apostle John, *that overcometh the world, even our faith.** It is the steadiness of firm and rooted principle, of belief in God and Christ, of belief in the everlasting importance of religion and virtue, which you are to oppose to the host of evil doers. —— Consider, I beseech you, that no fashions nor opinions of men can effect that unalterable law of God, which rests on the eternal basis of rectitude and truth. Men, if they please, may call evil, good, and good, evil; but as they cannot change the nature of things, their voice gives no sanction to any plan of conduct as right and wise.† So far are you from having any chance of holding either a wise or a safe course by going along with the multitude, that he who implicitly follows them may be justly presumed to be in the path of error and of danger. For in every age the multitude have inquired superficially, have judged rashly, and acted inconsiderately. Concurrence with general practice, neither affords justification of conduct, nor promises impunity in what is evil. The righteous Lord of all will never suffer his laws to be subjected to the capricious fancies of his creatures. Transgressors will neither be screened by their numbers, nor escape by being hidden in a crowd.

In times, therefore, when corruption is prevalent, when vice under any of its modes is fashionable, we are particularly called upon to show that we have

* 1 John, v. 4.

† See this subject fully discussed in Sermon LXIX. of this Vol.

within us a *good*, which we can oppose to this *evil*; to show that we have fixed principles of our own, which we will surrender to no man, but upon which we will act, and will stand by them to the last. It ought to be no part of our character, that we seek to distinguish ourselves by affected austerity, and a marked singularity in frivolous and insignificant matters. Our distinction must rest upon a steady adherence to rational religion and the uncontrovertible rules of virtue, when the multitude around us, whether the high or the low, are deviating into licentious and criminal conduct. Depend upon it you may, that even that multitude, though they may attempt to turn you into ridicule, honour you at the bottom of their hearts. They will be compelled to acknowledge, or at least to feel, whether they acknowledge it or not, that your unsaken firmness in what you esteem to be honourable and worthy must proceed from some principle within, of a higher nature than that from which they act. At any rate, by thus maintaining in every situation the cause of religion and truth, and thereby overcoming evil with your good, you shall obtain honour from the great Judge of the earth, and your reward shall be great in heaven.

Thus, in several important instances, I have shown how the exhortation in the text is to be complied with, and in what manner our good should overcome evil; overcoming injuries by generous forgiveness; overcoming misfortunes by patience and resignation; overcoming the temptations of evil examples by steady adherence to conscience and duty. In many of these cases, the conflict we are called to maintain

may be arduous and difficult; inclined, as we too often are, by the bent of our nature, to the evil side. But, if we wish and desire to do well, let us not be discouraged, nor despair of victory. Weak in ourselves, we have ground to be *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.* For the principle of good, feeble though it may be at present in human nature, is never left unbefriended by God. It is a principle derived from heaven, and partakes of heavenly efficacy. If it once take root in the soul, it will be made to arise and grow from small beginnings into gradual maturity, under his protection and influence from whom its origin came. To them who have no might, it is written, *he increaseth strength.** The contest between sin and righteousness, which at present takes place in the world, is a struggle between God and Belial, between the powers of light and the kingdom of darkness; and in this state of things we must easily discern to which side the final victory will belong. Let us endeavour to do our duty, and God will be with us. Let us sincerely study to overcome evil with good, and we shall overcome it. Our feeble powers shall be aided by Divine might, and our imperfect services crowned with Divine rewards. *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*†

* Isaiah, xl. 29. † Isaiah, xl. 31.

SERMON LXXXIII.

On a Life of Dissipation and Pleasure.

Proverbs, xiv. 13.

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.

PAINS and sorrows occur so frequently in human life, that it is not surprising that the multitude of men should eagerly court scenes of pleasure and joy. It is natural to seek relief from our cares, by whatever promises to substitute hours of gladness in the place of anxiety and trouble. But we have much reason to beware, lest a rash or unwary pursuit of pleasure defeat its end, lest the attempt to carry pleasure too far, tend, in the issue, to sink us into misery. *There is a way*, says the wise man in the verse preceding the Text, *which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.* There is a certain course of life which a man may have chosen to adopt, as leading to gladness and enjoyment; but which he shall find at last to be destructive of his happiness: for all is not real gladness, which has the appearance of being such. *There is a laughter, in the midst of which the heart is sorrowful; and a mirth, the end whereof is heaviness.*

From serious admonitions of this kind given in Scripture, it would be very unjust to infer, that religion is an enemy to all mirth and gaiety. It circumscribes our enjoyments, indeed, within the bounds

of temperance; but, as far as this sacred limit permits, it gives free scope to all the gratifications of life. It even heightens their relish to a virtuous man. It enlivens his cheerfulness, and allows him to enjoy with satisfaction all that prosperity affords him. The text is applicable only to that set of men to whom temperance is no restraint; who propose to themselves the unlimited enjoyment of amusement and pleasure in all their forms, as the sole object and business of life.

Such persons, too frequently to be met with in the age wherein we live, have utterly mistaken the nature and condition of man. From the participation of pleasure, as I just now observed, he is far from being excluded. But let him remember that a mediocrity only of enjoyment is allowed him, for his portion on earth. He is placed in a world, where, whatever his rank or station be, a certain part is allotted him to act; there are duties which are required of him; there are serious cares which must employ his mind, how to perform properly the various offices of life, and to fill up the place which belongs to him in society. — He who, laying aside all thoughts and cares of this kind, finding himself in the possession of easy or affluent fortune, and in the bloom of life, says within himself, "What have I to do, but to seek out "every pleasure and amusement which the world "can afford me? Let others toil in the common "walks of life, who have to make their fortunes by "sober and dull application. But to me labour is "superfluous; the world is open. Wherever amuse-"ment invites, or pleasure calls, there I go. By "passing my days and nights in whatever can enter-"tain my fancy or gratify my senses, life shall to me

"be rendered delightful." — He, I say, who thinks thus, vainly endeavours to counteract the intention of nature, and the decree of Providence. He attempts to render his state on earth, what it was never designed to be. He might as well expect that the physical laws of nature should be altered on his account; and that, instead of being confined to walk like ordinary men on the ground, he should obtain the privilege of treading on the air, as expect to enjoy a state of perpetual pleasure, by devoting himself to pleasure wholly, and setting aside all the serious cares and duties of life. Troubles, he may be well assured, are prepared for him, and await him. Where he expected satisfaction, he shall meet with disappointment; and in him shall be verified the saying in the Text, that *even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.* —— But lest, to persons of this description, such general reasoning, from the established constitution of Providence, may not be satisfactory, I proceed to show them how clearly it is confirmed by facts. For this purpose let us observe,

In the first place, the obvious consequences of a life of pleasure and dissipation, to health, fortune, and character. To each of these, it is an enemy, precisely according to the degree to which it is carried. —— Character is soon affected by it. As the man of dissipation often makes his appearance in public, his course is marked, and his character is quickly decided, by general opinion according to the line which he is observed to pursue. By frivolity and levity, he dwindles into insignificance. By vicious excesses, or criminal pleasures, he incurs disapproba-

tion or contempt. The fair prospects which his friends had once entertained of him die away, in proportion as his idleness or extravagance grows; and the only hope which remains is, that some fortunate incident may occur to check his career, and reclaim him to a better mind. In the mean time, the respectable and the grave smile at his follies, and avoid his company. In the midst of some fashionable assemblies he may shine; by some of his fellows he may be admired; but in the world he is of no significance or consequence, any more than the little animals that sport around him. — Health, the most valuable of all temporal blessings, is known to be preserved by temperance and a regular life. But, by the men of dissipation, it is readily sacrificed at the shrine of pleasure. To years of health and soundness, they are often so foolish as to prefer a few hours of sensual gratification. Supposing that no extravagant excesses, or vicious pleasures, cut short their health and life, yet what constitution can stand the irregular hours, the disorderly living, the careless indulgence into which the love of pleasure draws those who devote themselves to it? Hence the shattered and debilitated body, and the premature old age. The native vigour and sprightliness of youth is melted down by effeminacy and sensuality. The spirits are weakened and enervated, if not sunk and lost for ever. —— The state of their fortune may, for a while, enable them to indulge their pleasures, and to maintain the figure they wish to keep up in the world; but let fortune be ever so affluent, in the possession of such persons, it is in the high road to decay. For to them, attention to business, or to the management of their affairs, becomes a burden, which they studiously shun.

Prudent economy is disdained, as a mean attention, belonging only to vulgar and narrow minds. Their habits of licentiousness require unlimited indulgence. The demands of passion must be immediately supplied, whatever the consequences be. Hence, delivering themselves up to those who can furnish supply for their expense, or who pretend to take charge of their affairs, they become the prey of the crafty, who fatten on their spoils; till at last, in the midst of thoughtless extravagance, and of general waste and profusion, they see nothing remaining to them but the ruins of a broken fortune.

Such are some of the miseries attending habits of dissipation, and the intemperate love of pleasure. We see them daily exemplified in the world, throughout all the stages of this character, from the frivolous and the giddy, up to the rake and the profligate; in some stages, only impairing health and fortune; in others, entirely overthrowing them; in their beginnings, casting a shade on the characters of men; in their completion, exposing them to disgrace and misery.—— Even abstracting from those ultimate consequences in which irregular pleasures terminate, the gratification, which, in the mean time, they bestow, is dearly paid for. A temporary satisfaction, it is admitted, they afford. They raise the spirits to a degree of elevation above their usual tone, but in that forced elevation they can never long remain; and in proportion to the elevation to which they were raised, is the degree of depression to which they subside. Experience has shown, that no sensual pleasure, except what is regulated by temperance, can be lasting. Every pleasure that is carried beyond it, is no more than a momentary

explosion; a transient gush; a torrent that comes down impetuously, sparkling and foaming in its course, but that soon runs out, and leaves a muddy and polluted channel. Who knows not the languor and dejection that follow every excessive indulgence of pleasure, or a long continuation of amusement of any kind? From whom do you hear such frequent complaints of low spirits, as from those who spend most of their time in the circles of dissipation and gaiety, or in the revelry of the world? To what wretched and pernicious resources are they obliged to fly, in order to recruit their spirits, and restore some life to their deadened sensations? What melancholy spectacles do they at length exhibit of a worn-out frame, and an exhausted mind? So well-founded is the assertion in the Text, that there is *a mirth, the end of which is heaviness.*

Let us consider, in the second place, the ruin which a life of pleasure and dissipation brings upon the moral state and character of men, as well as on their external condition. This deserves the more attention, as the pursuit of pleasure sometimes sets out at the beginning with a fair and innocent appearance. It promises to bestow satisfactions unknown to a duller race of mortals; and, at the same time, to allow virtue and honour to remain. With a great part of mankind, especially with those who are most likely to run the race of pleasure, such as are well-born and have been regularly educated, some attachment to good principles at first is found. They cannot as yet bear the reproach of any thing that is dishonourable or base. Regard to their word, generosity of sentiment, attachment to their friends, and

compassion for the unhappy, prevail for a while in their hearts.—— But, alas! as the love of pleasure gains ground, with what insidious steps does it advance towards the abolition of all virtuous principles? It has been ever found, that without the assistance of reflection, and of serious thought, virtue cannot long subsist in the human mind. But to reflection and serious thoughts, the men of dissipation are strangers. Absorbed, as they are, in the whirlpool of fashionable life, and hurried along by a rapid succession of amusements, reflection is lost, and good impressions gradually decay. Nothing is regarded but present enjoyment, and plans of improving on that enjoyment, in future. As their taste, and their acquired habits, carry them into the society of licentious company, they must follow the more trained votaries of pleasure who naturally take the lead. They become assimilated to the manners of their loose associates; and, without perceiving it themselves, their whole character by degrees is changed. Former restraints are now laid aside; and, in order to preserve the rank of equality with their companions in every expense, prodigality is the necessary consequence. Prodigality presently opens a way to the worst vices. They become both covetous and profuse; profuse in spending, but covetous to acquire. In order to carry on the splendour of life, and to indulge their inclinations to the full, they now submit to what, at their first outset in life, they would have rejected as mean and base. Now is the creditor defrauded; the tenant racked and oppressed; the tradesman frustrated of the reward of his honest industry; and friends and relations, on whom any impression can be made, are plundered without

mercy. — In this manner all the bland and smiling appearances which mirth and gaiety once carried, are transformed into the blackest shapes of vice; and from a character originally stamped only with giddiness and levity, shoots forth a character compounded of dishonesty, injustice, oppression, and cruelty.

Is there any one who will deny, that the intemperate pursuit of pleasure leads frequently into all the vices now mentioned, and that some of them it carries always in its train? I shall not dwell on certain crimes, which none but the most atrocious devotees of pleasure will pretend to justify, though all who partake of that character make too light of them; such as, the violation of the marriage-bed, the seduction of the innocent, and the introduction of misery into families once happy and flourishing. These are crimes that require the interposition of the lawgiver and the judge, more than the admonition of the preacher. — Let us only think for a little of that reproach of modern times, that gulf of time and fortune, the passion for gaming, which is so often the refuge of the idle sons of pleasure, and often also the last resource of the ruined. To how many bad passions, to how many base arts, does it give rise? What violent agitations of the mind, sometimes bursting into rage and frenzy, does it occasion? What a shameful traffic of gain does it form among persons, whom their rank in life, and their connections in society, ought to have raised above the thoughts of enriching themselves by such dishonourable means? How many friendships has it broken? How many families has it ruined? In what deadly catastrophes has it often terminated? The gamester sits down at the fatal table with eager spirits and

mighty hopes. Behold him when he rises, — a wretch, haggard and forlorn, cursing his fate, and, from despair of retrieving his ruined fortune, driven perhaps to entertain the horrid thought of ending his own existence! —— Dismissing so melancholy a theme, let us,

In the third place, attend to the disquieting sensations which are apt to intrude upon the men of pleasure, even in the midst of their enjoyments. Not only is the *end of their mirth heaviness*, but *in laughter*, as it is expressed in the text, *the heart is sorrowful*. Often is laughter affected when the heart is galled within. A show of mirth is put on to cover some secret disquiet. When you enter into a gay and festive assembly, you behold every appearance of sparkling felicity. Alas! could you look into the breasts of this seemingly happy company, how inconsiderable would the proportion be found of those who are truly happy! how great the proportion of those who, either in their minds, were entirely vacant and languid; or who fled to scenes of gaiety in order to fly from themselves, from domestic uneasiness, or corroding cares, and in the tumult of company and forced mirth, to drown their sorrows! —— At the best, the flashes of joy, which burst from the dissipated and careless, are of a transient and broken kind, interrupted by reflections which they cannot altogether avoid. For at the bottom of the hearts of most men, even amidst an irregular life, there lies a secret feeling of propriety, a sense of right and wrong in conduct. This inward sense is frequently so much borne down by appetites and passions, as to lose its power of guiding men to what is right, while yet it

retains as much influence as to make them sensible that they have been doing wrong; that they have not acted that part in life which they ought to have acted, and which their friends, and the world, had a title to expect from them. Though conscience be not strong enough to guide, it still has strength to dart a sting. — Together with this consciousness of ill desert, there will be at some times joined a humbling sense of their own insignificancy, when they behold others meeting with esteem and honour for having acted a manly and worthy part in life. Their superiority they are obliged to acknowledge, and to look up to them with respect; while the retrospect of their own life affords nothing but shame, and the bitter remembrance of time they have mis-spent, and opportunities they have thrown away. — In the midst too of mortifying reflections of this kind, it will not be in their power to escape altogether from a dread of certain consequences which are in hazard of befalling from their careless conduct. Scarcely is any fortune so stable as to be beyond the reach of accidents that will diminish it. To none so readily as to the men of pleasure, are such accidents likely to happen; and fond as they are of their present superb train of living, the dread that it may not be in their power always to continue it, will, in spite of all their endeavours to avoid such thoughts, occasionally force itself upon them, and cast a cloud over many a scene of projected merriment.

Can you reckon that to be sincere joy, which is liable to be interrupted and mingled with so many sensations of the most disagreeable nature? In the cup of intemperance, or in the tumult of loose society, the man of pleasure studies to drown them. But often his efforts are vain. When he pushes to

the utmost his scenes of criminal revelry, they will carry the resemblance of Belshazzar's feast; at which, while the impious monarch was drinking amongst his lords and concubines, he beheld the fingers of a man's hand writing in unknown characters on the wall over against him; *and his countenance changed, and his heart sunk within him.** Thus, in the midst of riot, imagined spectres have been known to haunt the man of guilty pleasure. He sees hands coming forth to write on the wall against him. The very portraits of his ancestors, which hang in his hall, appear to him to look with frowning aspect, and to upbraid him with wasting in licentious pleasures the fortune which their honourable labours or virtuous industry had acquired. — Of all the classes of sinners, it has been found, that none are so liable, in some period of their lives, or at least when life is drawing to its close, to be smitten with severe remorse, as those who have sacrificed to pleasure all the calls of conscience and of duty.

Let us consider, in the last place, how unsuitable a life of dissipation and pleasure is to the condition of man in this world, and how injurious to the interests of society. In the world we are surrounded with scenes of distress. We behold the greatest part of the human race doomed to hard labour and penurious subsistence. We hear the cries of indigence. We know that every day thousands are yielding up their breath, and thousands are attending their dying friends. Our own lives are fleeting fast away. Flourishing as our state may at present seem, we know there is but a step between us and

* Daniel, v. 5.

death. The youngest and the healthiest cannot tell whether they may not, within the space of a few days, be called to undergo the judgment of God. — Is this a time, is this a place, where no other thing is to be pursued but giddy amusement and perpetual pleasure? Have you, my friends, who are spending your days in this wanton abuse of prosperity, no sense of the unsuitableness of such conduct to the condition of mortal man? Do you see nothing in the state of human life to chasten and temper your mirth; to bring serious reflections home to your bosom; to admonish you that it is better to go sometimes *to the house of mourning*, than to dwell always *in the house of feasting?* — Do you feel no compunction at the thought that, by your luxury and extravagance, you are adding to the scenes of sorrow which already abound in this afflicted world? For you, and your follies, the aged parent or the respectable relation mourn. To supply the oppressive demands of your pleasures, families are driven from their habitations, and left to poverty and want. Your mirth forces the widow and the fatherless to weep. — At the same time, you are scattering poison in society around you. You are corrupting the public manners by the life which you lead. You are propagating follies and vices; and by the example which you set are ensnaring many to follow you into ruin. —— Consider with how much discontent and indignation the poorer classes of men, all the while, behold you. Especially, if in times of scarcity and of war, such as those in which I now write, they see you indulging in wastefulness and thoughtless profusion, when they and their families are not able to earn their bread. As long as wealth is properly employed,

persons in low situations naturally look up to their superiors with respect. They rest contented in their station. They are even disposed to bless the hand which furnishes them with employment on reasonable terms, and occasionally dispenses seasonable relief. But if they feel themselves oppressed, merely that a few may be enabled to squander at pleasure, and to revel in wasteful excess, their discontents are not easily suppressed. With sullen murmurs they issue from their impoverished habitations, prepared for every evil work.

SUCH are some of the consequences which flow from dissipation and the intemperate love of pleasure. Let not the effect of what has been said be frustrated by this evasion, that although the descriptions which have been given be just and true, yet they are applicable only to such as have carried their pursuit of pleasure to the most criminal excess; a class, in which few, if any, will admit that they deserve to be ranked. — They who are only beginning the course of vicious pleasure, and who sin within prescribed bounds, may reckon with certainty on their bearing a share of the evils and miseries which I have described. Not only so, but having once entered on an irregular course, they cannot tell where they are to stop. They have drunk from the cup of the enchantress; and being fairly brought within the magic circle, their powers of reflection are laid asleep, and to make an escape may not be in their power.

To some, it may perhaps appear, that the whole strain of this discourse refers only to the rich and the great; and that persons of moderate fortune, and of the middle ranks of life, who form the great body of

society, have little or no concern in it. But this is entirely a mistake. Splendid fortune, and high birth or rank, afford, beyond doubt, the strongest and most frequent temptations to the loose indulgence of every enjoyment. But throughout all ranks the danger extends, of being misled by pleasure in some of its forms. In this country, where wealth and abundance are so much diffused over all stations; where it is well known that the inferior orders of men are perpetually pressing upon those who are above them, and following them in their manners, a life of dissipation is perhaps not less frequent among the middle, than among the higher classes of society. The modes of amusement may not be so refined. The entertainments and pleasures may be of a grosser kind. But in many an inferior circle, there prevails as much love of pomp and show, as much proportional extravagance in expense, as much rivalry in the competition of passions and pleasures, as in the most fashionable and courtly assemblies. Sober reflections are as much laid aside; the gratification of vanity, and the indulgence of pleasure, are pursued with equal eagerness.——Let us therefore, my brethren, in whatever rank of life we are placed, proceed upon this as our great principle, that to serve God, to attend to the serious cares of life, and to discharge faithfully the duties of our station, ought to be the first concern of every man who wishes to be wise and happy; that amusement and pleasure are to be considered as the relaxation, not the business of life; and that if from those sentiments we depart, and give ourselves up to pleasure as our only object, *even in laughter the heart shall be sorrowful, and the end of our mirth shall be heaviness.*

SERMON LXXXIV.

On the Conscience void of Offence.

Acts, xxiv. 16.

Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward men.

THESE words were spoken by the Apostle Paul, in the course of that manly and spirited defence which he made for himself, when accused of sedition and impiety before Felix, the Roman Governor. He vindicates himself from the charges brought against him; but boldly avows his principles, conceals no part he had acted, gives up no doctrine he had taught, and with the firm consciousness of innocence, appeals to his enemies themselves for the unblemished integrity of his life and character.

To maintain *always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men* is a degree of virtue to which, in its full extent, none can lay claim. For who is there among the sons of men that can pretend, on every occasion, throughout his whole life, to have preserved a faultless conduct? How few days, indeed, go over our heads wherein something does not pass, in which our behaviour has not been altogether correct, or free from every offence? In the present imbecility and fallen state of human nature, he is the worthiest person who is guilty of the fewest offences towards God or towards man. But though

the character referred to in the Text be not attainable by us in a complete degree, it is the character to which we must all study to approach; to come as near to it as the weakness of our nature admits; so that neither in piety towards God, nor in social duties towards men, we may be found remarkably deficient. —— You will observe, that this great Apostle does not boast of having fully attained to a conscience void of every offence. His words are, that *herein he exercised himself;* that is, this was his object and his study, to this he formed and trained himself, to have *always a conscience void of offence towards God and men.* —— Assuredly, there is nothing in human life, more amiable and respectable than such a character. Wherever it appears, it commands universal reverence in every station, whether high or low. It is indeed what all men would wish to gain; at least they wish that others should believe them to possess it. Even the most corrupt look to it, from afar, with a sigh; and however obliged to condemn themselves for having fallen short of it, cannot help esteeming and respecting others who are dignified by the attainment of it. —— Let us then consider, first, what is implied in *exercising* or forming ourselves to maintain the conscience void of offence; and next, what the effects will be of having, in some degree, attained it.

I. In *exercising* ourselves for this purpose our first care must be to have our conscience well informed, or properly instructed, as to what is, or is not, real ground of offence towards God, or towards men. Conscience is the guide, or the enlightening and directing principle of conduct; and as our Saviour has warned us, *If the light which is in thee be darkness,*

how great will that darkness be? * If that which should guide us be itself misled, how widely must we wander astray? — There are two extremes here, to each of which different sets of men are apt erroneously to incline. One set of men are apt to be minutely scrupulous about matters of smaller importance; *tithing*, as the Scripture describes them, *mint, anise, and cumin, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law.* Punctual in their observance of all the forms and ceremonies of religion, they hope by this means to compensate for allowing themselves in unlawful pleasures or unrighteous gains. Another, and perhaps a more numerous set of men err from loose casuistry in matters of moral duty. They admit the obligation they are under to virtuous practice; but they lay the whole stress of virtue on some particular good dispositions to which their temper inclines them. On these they highly value themselves; but breaches of other parts of duty, they are apt to consider as small and venial transgressions. They have balances of their own, in which they weigh every transgression; and if any of the offences they have committed, either against God or their neighbour, weigh light in the scale of fashion or general practice, they appear to them as scarcely any offences at all. — Both these extremes we must carefully guard against: and study to regulate our conduct by the pure unsophisticated laws of God; resting our character neither on a strict observance merely of the external forms of religion, nor on a partial regard to its moral duties; but attending to all that God has required from us as men and Chris-

* Matth. vi. 23.

tians.—The truth is, such errors as I have pointed out, always have their source in some corruption of the heart. It is not from inability to discover what they ought to do, that men err in practice. It is from some oblique regard to their interests or their pleasures, to their reputation or their gain, that they deviate into by-paths, while they affect to assume some appearance of principle. Fairness and uprightness of mind are the chief requisites for directing our conscience how to avoid offences towards God or man. He who, with an honest intention, seeks in every case to know what it is his duty to do, will seldom or never be at a loss to discover it.

In the next place, it belongs to every one who studies to attain to a conscience void of offence, to make reparation for whatever wrong he is conscious of having formerly done. This is the most difficult, but at the same time the most satisfactory test, of our sincerity in desiring to have a clear conscience before God and man. How can he be sincere in this desire, who allows himself to remain quiet while loaded with the sense that all he now enjoys has been obtained by injustice and fraud? If he continues, without remorse, to fatten upon the gains of uprighteousness; to feast on the spoils of the industrious; to revel in luxuries purchased by oppression or treachery; dare he hold up his face, and utter the name of Conscience? *Woe to him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong.** In the midst of his stately habitation, *the stone*, in the expressive language of Scripture, *shall cry out of the*

* Jerem. xxii. 13.

*wall against him; and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.** —— It may not be always in a man's power to make exact restitution of every unlawful gain he has acquired; but to make reparation to the utmost of his power, for every wrong he has done to others, is the duty of every one who lays any claim to principle or honesty. If this be entirely neglected, it is the mark of a conscience that is become dead to all sense of right and wrong. In vain we pretend to clear our conscience, by affecting to compensate for fraud or cruelty, either by acts of strict religious homage towards God, or by some partial virtues and shows of generosity towards men. With respect to men, we ought to learn that we must begin with being just, before we can attempt to be generous. With respect to God, we know that he delights in *mercy more than sacrifice;* and rejects with contempt the hypocritical worshipper. *I will come near to you in judgment, saith the Lord; and I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling, the widow, and the fatherless; and that turn aside the stranger from his right. — The Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.*†

After making reparation for the wrongs he has committed, the next study of every one who is *exercising himself to have the conscience void of offence,* should be to guard against those particular snares, which have formerly led him into evil. — If, for instance, covetousness has on many occasions tempted him to defraud or oppress, that he might increase his worldly store, it ought to be his first care to cor-

* Habak. ii. 11. † Malachi, iii. 5.

rect in future this inordinate passion for wealth, by bringing down in his estimation the acquisitions of fortune to their proper value; so that he may remain satisfied with a moderate share of the world's goods, and become sensible of what small importance great riches are to real happiness. If ambition has impelled him to rise into consideration by crooked policy and intrigues, let him impress his mind with all the considerations that will show him the emptiness and vanity of worldly honours. If a loose and careless life has brought him into habits of dissipation, and led him to neglect those religious duties which he owed to his Maker, let him return to the regular worship of God; and nourish an awful fear and reverence of that Almighty Being, on whom his all depends in time and eternity.——In this manner it must be his care to begin, by eradicating those corruptions, which, on different occasions, have tempted him to violate conscience. This study to reform all known errors in former life, will be one of the most satisfying marks of a sincere design to preserve in future a conscience void of offence. For if any of the old vitiated parts of the disposition be allowed to remain in their former state, in vain will any man apply himself to a thorough reformation of character. The favourite ruling passion, if it be suffered to keep its ascendant, will not fail to drag the life after it.

In the last place, in order to carry on this discipline which I have been recommending for obtaining a good conscience, it will be highly necessary, that we frequently examine ourselves, and bring our conduct under review. No day ought to pass over our head, without some exercise of this kind. Every

evening before we go to rest, we should subject to scrutiny the transactions in which we have been engaged. "What have I done this day, by which I "may either have justly offended any man, or have "shown neglect of God? What duty have I trans-"gressed? Wherein have I omitted to act the part "which my Maker, or my fellow-creatures, had a "title to expect from me?"—Be assured, my friends, that only by thus preserving conscience in the frequent exercise of its natural jurisdiction, you can support its rights. If you do not lead it in this manner often to assume its due station, its authority will gradually decline. There will be no accuracy in your moral conduct. Corruptions will grow upon you unawares. You will forget that you are creatures accountable for your actions, to a higher tribunal than that of the world.——It is a careless train of living, that is the general ruin of mankind. It is not so much from having adopted evil principles that men become wicked, as from having adopted no principles at all. They follow their inclinations, without examining whether there be any principles which they ought to form for regulating their conduct. The chief corrective of this mischief is that which has been suggested; by bringing conscience into a frequent exercise of its power, and thereby awakening its authority over our life.—Bitterly it may at times reprove us for our sins and follies. Sharply it may sting. But those reproofs and those stings are salutary in their effect; and tend to prevent us from proceeding headlong in a downward course. If ever conscience become altogether dead and still, the symptom is ominous of our having contracted from hardened vice that mortal lethargy, from

which we are only to be awakened at the day of judgment.

II. HAVING thus suggested some of the particulars which appear most essential in *exercising* or forming *ourselves to attain to a conscience void of offence towards God and men*, I come next to recommend this discipline by showing the happy effects it will produce. These happy effects are manifold; to avoid prolixity, I shall comprise them under two general heads. Such a clear conscience sets us free from the terrors of another world; it exempts us from a multitude of disquietudes in this.

FIRST, the conscience void of offence tends to procure freedom from the terrors of another world. Many, I know, in the gaiety of their hearts, pretend to make light of terrors of this kind; yet nothing is more certain, than that they are capable of assailing and dismaying the stoutest heart. Conscience is too great a power in the nature of man to be altogether subdued. It may for a time be repressed and kept dormant. But conjunctures there are in human life which awaken it; and when once awakened, it flashes on the sinner's mind with all the horrors of an invisible Ruler and a future judgment. It has been so ordered by Providence, that it is always in the evil day, at the season when men stand most in need of consolation and support, that conscience exerts its vengeance on the guilty. I might mention what is suffered in the lonely hours of solitude and silence, when the sinner's mind is humbled and depressed by some recent disgrace, or some disappointment in his criminal pursuits. But let me only

lead your thoughts to what must await us all, when we shall have arrived at the decline of life; when we feel the hand of death upon us, and cannot any more flatter ourselves that it will long delay giving the fatal stroke. *Sufficient*, and more than sufficient, *for that day will be the evil thereof*, even supposing that nothing within shall alarm us with dark forebodings of what is to follow. But if at the time when we are oppressed with sickness or pain upon our bed, distressed perhaps with the situation of our family and worldly affairs, and just about to take the last farewell of our friends and of all we have ever loved on earth; if in the midst of this scene of distress, we shall be also tormented with the thought of what is to become of us in that next world which is just opening to our view; if we depart from life, conscious that we deserve punishment for the manner in which we have lived; and dreading that the hour of our being to receive that punishment is at hand; such a state of complicated misery who can endure? *The spirit thus wounded* and bleeding, when it is going forth from the body, *who can bear?*

I by no means say, that he, who during his life has taken the greatest care to preserve his conscience void of offence, can upon that plea rest with confidence; or upon this ground alone leave this life without uneasiness or fear. No man's conscience was ever entirely clear from all reproach. We daily offend; and the best have much reason to implore mercy and forgiveness from their judge. The whole strain of the Gospel tends to humble and depress those who vainly trust to their own imperfect righteousness. It teaches us that the ultimate ground on which we are to rest for acceptance with God, is the

righteousness and merit of our great Redeemer. —— But this I say and testify to you, that the most satisfactory evidence you can possess, of having an interest in the Redeemer's merits, and being finally accepted through him, must arise from the testimony of a conscience, which you have studied to keep *void of offence towards God and towards men.* This will be the best proof of your belonging to the number of the sons of God. It will be the witness of the Divine Spirit within you: the day-star arising in your hearts, and preparing the approach of a more perfect day.—Without the study of attaining a good conscience be assured that all other grounds of hope will prove fallacious: not the most fervent zeal, nor the highest pretences to intercourse with God, will be of any avail. They will have no more stability than the house built on the sand, which, in the day of trial, falls to the ground. He only whose conscience bears witness to his faithfulness, his integrity, and sincerity, in discharging all the duties of life, can with a steady mind, and a firm but humble trust in his Saviour, look forward to all that awaits him in a future unknown world.

In the next place, while the conscience void of offence thus delivers us, in a great degree, from the terrors of a future life, it keeps us free, at the same time, from innumerable disquietudes in this life. All the offences for which conscience condemns us, become, in one way or other, sources of vexation. Never did any man long forsake the straight and upright path, without having cause to repent of it. Whether it be pleasure, or interest, or ambition, that leads him astray, he is always made to pay dear for any supposed advantage he gains. Warily and cau-

tiously he may at first set out, and lay many restraints on himself against proceeding too far. But having once forsaken conscience as his guide, his passions and inclinations soon take the lead of his conduct, and push him forward rashly. One bad step betrays him into another; till, in the end, he is overtaken, if not by poverty and disease, at least by dishonour and shame, by the loss of friends, and the forfeiture of general esteem. *He who walketh uprightly*, has been always found to *walk surely*: while in the dark and crooked paths of fraud, dishonesty, or ignoble pleasure, a thousand forms of trouble and disaster arise to meet us. In the mean time to a bad man, conscience will be always an uneasy companion. In the midst of his amusements, it will frequently break in upon him with reproach. At night, when he would go to rest, holding up to him the deeds of the former day, putting him in mind of what he has lost and what he has incurred, it will make him often ashamed, often afraid. —— Cowardice and baseness of mind are never-failing concomitants of a guilty conscience. He who is haunted by it, dares never stand forth to the world, and appear in his own character. He is reduced to be constantly studying concealment and living in disguise. He must put on the smiling and open look, when dark designs are brooding in his mind. Conscious of his own bad purposes, he looks with distrust on all who are around him, and shrinks from the scrutiny of every piercing eye. He sees, or fancies that he sees, suspicion in many a countenance; and reads upbraidings in looks where no upbraiding was meant. Often he *is in great fear, where no fear is.*

Very different from this, is the state of the man

whose conscience is void of offence. He is manly and intrepid in every situation. He has never seduced the innocent by guilty arts. He has deluded no one with false promises. He has ensnared no man to trust him by a deceitful account of his affairs; nor taken any advantages of the distresses of others to enrich himself. Without uneasiness he can look every man boldly in the face; and say with the good Prophet Samuel; *Behold here I am; witness against me. Whose ox have I taken? or, whose ass have I taken? or, whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Of whose hand have I received any bribe? Declare, and I will restore it to you.* * He who can thus take God and the world to witness for his integrity, may despise popular accusation or reproach. Those censures and rumours which are constantly disquieting the man of guilty conscience, pass by him unheeded. *His witness is in heaven; and his record is on high.* Innocence and uprightness form a tenfold shield, against which the darts of the world are aimed in vain. Of neither God as his Judge, nor of men as his companions, is such a man afraid. With no unquiet nor terrifying slumbers will his couch be haunted. *I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for the Lord maketh me dwell in safety.*

Let those considerations which have been now briefly suggested, contribute to render the character in the Text, *of a conscience void of offence towards God and man,* amiable and estimable in our eyes. If in its fullest extent we cannot attain to it, let us at least endeavour to approach to it, and herein with

* 1 Samuel, xii. 3.

the great Apostle *exercise ourselves*. We may rest assured, that the more we partake of this character, the happier and more honourable shall our life be on earth, and the nearer shall it bring us to Heaven. Conscious of our innumerable frailties, let it be our daily prayer to God, that by his powerful Spirit he would rectify what is corrupted in our nature; would guard us by his grace against the temptations that surround us; *keep us from the path of the destroyer, and lead us in his way everlasting*.

SERMON LXXXV.

On the Ascension of Christ.

[Preached in the Evening after the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

LUKE, xxiv. 50, 51.

And he led them out as far as to Bethany; and he lift up his hands and blessed them; And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into Heaven.

THE sacred scriptures not only set before us a complete rule of life, but give weight and authority to the precepts they deliver, by the information they communicate, of certain great and important facts, in which all the human race have a deep concern. Of those facts one of the most illustrious is the ascension of our Saviour to Heaven, after having completed the work of our redemption. This is a subject on which it is at all times pleasing to a Christian to meditate; but especially after the celebration of that solemn ordinance in which we were this day engaged. We there renewed the memorial of our Saviour suffering and dying in the cause of mankind. Let us now take part in his succeeding triumphs. Let us with pleasure behold him rising from the grave, as the conqueror of death and hell, and ascending into Heaven, there to reign

in glory, and to act as the protector and guardian of his people, to the end of time. — It will be proper to begin with taking a particular view of all the circumstances that attended this memorable event in the history of our Saviour's life; as they are related in the text, compared with the accounts of other evangelists. The circumstances will all be found to be both beautiful and sublime in themselves, and instructive to us.

We are informed *, that it was not until forty days after his resurrection from the grave, that this event took place. During this space he had *shown himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being often seen by his disciples, and conversing with them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* All being now concluded which he had to do on earth; the guilt of mankind having been expiated by his death, and his Apostles fully instructed in the part they were henceforth to act, and the character they were to assume; one day, we are told, he *led them out of the city as far as to Bethany.* — With the utmost propriety was this place selected for the scene of his ascension. Near Bethany was the mount of Olives, to which our Lord was wont so often to retire for the exercise of private devotion; and there also was the garden of Gethsemane, where his sufferings commenced with that agony in which his *soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death.* At the spot where his generous sufferings on our account began, there also was his glory to commence; and those fields which so long had been his favourite retreat, and so often had been consecrated by him to medi-

* Acts, i. 3.

tation and prayer, were now to be dignified with his last and parting steps towards heaven; a sort of symbol of devotion and virtuous sufferings, being steps that prepare for ascent to heaven.—There, we are told, *He lift up his hands and blessed his disciples; and while he blessed them, he was parted from them.* How beautiful is this attitude of our departing Lord! How well did such a conclusion suit the rest of his life! *Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.* While he lived, *he went about doing good:* He died, praying for his enemies; and when he ascended into heaven, it was in the act of lifting up his hands and blessing his friends; like a dying parent giving his last benediction to his children and family. A worthy pattern is here set before us, of the manner in which every good man should wish to spend his last moments, in acts of devotion to God, and expressions of kindness and affection to his friends.—While our Saviour was thus employed, he was *parted from his disciples; a cloud*, it is said, *received him out of their sight* *, *and he was carried up into heaven.* Here were no whirlwinds, no thunders, no chariots of fire. Supernatural appearances of old, had been accompanied with majesty of a terrible kind. The law was given in the midst of lightnings and thunders. Elijah was caught up into heaven in a fiery chariot. But the Saviour of the world was gently *received up in a cloud;* with that sort of meek and calm magnificence which bespeaks the peaceful genius of the Gospel and its Author.——Angels likewise assisted at this solemnity, as in every dispensation friendly to mankind these bene-

* Acts, i. 9.

volent spirits are represented as taking part. At the creation of the world, *the morning stars*, it is said, *sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.** At the birth of our Lord, we hear of their songs of praise and joy; we find them present at his resurrection from the dead; and now again at his ascension into heaven. *While his disciples looked stedfastly towards heaven, as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*†

Such were the circumstances which accompanied that great and signal event of Christ's ascension into Heaven; all of them very solemn and striking, and calculated to leave a deep impression on the minds of his disciples. —— Let us now proceed to consider the ends and purposes of our Saviour's ascension, as far as they are revealed and made known to us; and, together with them, the effects which ought thereby to be produced on our minds.

In the first place, by our Saviour's ascension into heaven, it was made to appear that the great design for which he descended to the earth was completely fulfilled. A solemn attestation was thus given by God, to the virtue and efficacy of that great sacrifice which he offered by his death for the sins of the world: It was declared that in consideration of the high merits and generous sufferings of the Son of

* Job, xxxviii. 7. † Acts, i. 10, 11.

God, pardon and grace were to be extended to the fallen race of men. Therefore, *God raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might stand in God.*

Hence the ascension of our Lord is to be considered as a display from heaven of the olive branch to mankind. It is a most august ratification of that covenant of grace on which are founded all our hopes of acceptance with God. We lay under the sentence of condemnation as an offending guilty race, till Christ undertook our cause, and by his resurrection and ascension proved that he succeeded in what he had undertaken. As soon as he was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God, the terrors of the law were withdrawn. Ancient prophecies were fulfilled, which represented the coming of the Messiah as the renovation of the world, as the era of declared grace and peace to mankind. The ascension of Christ was the signal of his triumph over all the powers of darkness. Long they had meditated our ruin, and maintained the reign of idolatry among the nations. But the period was now come when their power was to be overthrown. When Christ, as it was predicted of old by the inspired Psalmist, *ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. He* then spoiled *principalities and powers.** He *destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil*†; and the *gifts* which, as tokens of victory, he bestowed among his followers, were no less than peace, pardon, and eternal life.—— While our Lord's ascension thus serves to establish our faith in the Gospel,

* Coloss. ii. 15. † Heb. ii. 14.

It is, in the next place, to be viewed by us with respect to Christ himself, as a merited restoration to his original felicity. As the Son of God, all glory belonged to him for ever. The Divine nature could neither suffer any real depression, nor receive any additional advancement. But it was as a man, that he appeared and acted on earth; that he suffered and died. What he had done in that character, entitled him as a man to the highest rewards. Accordingly it is in this view of merited recompence, that his ascension and exaltation at the right hand of God is always set forth in Scripture. Because *he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow — and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** — In this constitution of Providence, an illustrious testimony was designed to be given of God's regard and love to eminent righteousness. *We see Jesus*, as the Apostle speaks, *for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour.*† We see signal pre-eminence made the reward of signal condescension for the sake of mankind; and self-abasement and humiliation made the road to glory. We are taught, in this great instance, that God never deserts the cause that is his own, nor leaves worth and piety to be finally oppressed; though for a while he may allow trials and hardships to be undergone by the best men. No person could

* Philipp. ii. 7, &c. † Heb. ii. 9.

appear more neglected and forsaken by God, than our Saviour was, for a season, when in the hands of his foes. Important purposes of Providence were, during that season, carried on; but as soon as those purposes were accomplished, God came forth in support of righteousness and truth, and by the high honours bestowed on Christ, established his eternal triumph over all his foes.

While we thus view our Saviour's ascension as a glorification justly merited on his own account, we cannot but on our part highly rejoice in it from a sense of the obligations we lie under to him. Devoid of every just and honourable sentiment must he be, who partakes not with cordial satisfaction in the success and triumph of a generous benefactor, who for his sake had exposed himself to much distress and danger. — In that holy sacrament which we this day celebrated, we beheld our blessed Saviour despised and rejected of men; we saw him treated as the vilest of malefactors, led to the hill of Golgotha with scorn and contempt, and there undergoing all that the cruelty of his enemies could contrive to inflict. All this we beheld him patiently and cheerfully enduring for our sake, in order to accomplish our redemption. —— Now, when at his next appearance we behold such a glorious revolution; when we behold him rising from the dead, ascending into the highest heavens, sitting down there at the right hand of God, and all things in heaven and earth made to bow before him, shall not we, my brethren, with thankful and devout hearts partake joyfully in his exaltation and felicity? —— Thou, O Divine Benefactor! O Illustrious Restorer of the lost hopes and happiness of mankind! Thou art most

worthy to be thus raised above all beings. Our sorrows once were thine. *For our transgressions thou wert bruised; and for our iniquities wounded.* Now, in thy joy we rejoice; and in thine honours we triumph. We with lifted hands will ever bless thee. Prostrate at thy feet, we will join with all the heavenly host in celebrating thy praises; in ascribing to *Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,* all power, and glory, and dominion for ever!

In the third place, Christ ascended into heaven that he might act there, in the presence of God, as our High Priest and Intercessor. This office which he performs, was pre-signified under the Jewish dispensation, by the High Priest entering once every year, on the great day of atonement, into the holiest place in the temple, and there sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy seat. *But Christ being come, an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered at once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us; he is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.* — *There,* we are told, *he ever liveth to make intercession for his people.* * — By his appearing in the human nature, while he is acting as intercessor for mankind, an everlasting memorial is presented to the Almighty of the Redeemer's love to men. That sacrifice which was offered on Mount Calvary, still continues to ascend before the throne; and that blood which

* Heb. ix. 11, 12. 24. — vii. 25.

was shed on the cross, flows for ever in the sight of God.

Concerning the nature of this intercession, which our Saviour is represented as making in Heaven, and his continuing to appear in the human nature for that purpose, I am aware that difficulties and objections may be raised by some. I readily admit, that the whole doctrine revealed to us in Scripture relating to the incarnation of Christ, the atonement made by his death, and the nature of his intercession for us in heaven, is of a mysterious kind. It is what we can comprehend in a very imperfect manner; and when we attempt too particularly to explain or discuss any of these doctrines, we are apt *to darken counsel by words without knowledge.* * — Let us not however imagine that the mysterious nature of those doctrines furnishes any just objection against the truth of the Christian revelation. It must be considered, that this revelation professes to give such a discovery of the spiritual invisible world, and of the administration of the Divine government, as was proper to be at present communicated to us. In such a revelation of things invisible and divine, and which stretch far beyond the reach of human knowledge or capacity, it was naturally to be expected that matters would occur which should be mysterious, and incomprehensible by us. Indeed, it would have been strange and incredible if it had been otherwise; if nothing had appeared on such subjects, but what was level to our apprehension. In the present material system, in the midst of which we live, and where the objects that surround us are con-

* Job, xxxviii. 2.

tinually exposed to the examination of our senses, how many things occur that are mysterious and unaccountable? The philosopher, age after age, has continued his researches into matter. After all his researches will he, at this day, refuse to acknowledge, that, in material substances, qualities have been discovered, powers and properties have been found, which it is beyond his power to reconcile to the commonly received laws and operations of matter, and which he cannot bring within the compass of any established system and theory? Shall this philosopher then, who finds himself so often baffled in his inquiries, by meeting with wonders in matter which he cannot explain, presume to reject a religious system, merely because in treating of an invisible world, and the administration of government there carried on by the Father of Spirits, particulars occur which appear incomprehensible to him?—My brethren, let us be a little more humble and sober in our attempts to philosophise. Let us be thankful, that having received a revelation, which, upon rational grounds, stands well attested and confirmed, the mysterious doctrines which occur in it are all of them such as to be perfectly reconcileable with godliness and virtue; nay, such as have a direct tendency to promote the moral influence of virtue on the lives of men; and to bring powerful consolation to them under many troubles.

This is remarkably exemplified in that doctrine of which we are now treating, of the office performed by our Lord upon his ascension into Heaven. A mediator and intercessor with God, is what most nations and religions have anxiously sought to obtain. It has

been at all times the favourite wish and hope of men; and from their earnestness to have this wish gratified, they contrived some form or other of mediation and intercession, on which they rested; some favourite hero or saint, or tutelary subordinate god, through whose intervention they sought to obtain favour from the Supreme Governor of the universe. This is an idea which we find prevailing under most of the modes of Pagan worship. Men were generally sensible that they were guilty of offences against the Deity; that their own services were insufficient to appease him; and that therefore they had no title to expect his favour, unless some mediator of high merit was to espouse their interest and plead their cause.—This relief, which the bewildered nations sought after in vain, is fully afforded us by the Gospel of Christ. A real mediator is there revealed, invested with such characters as give encouragement and satisfaction to every pious worshipper. The Divine nature of which he is possessed, gives infinite merit and efficacy to every cause which he undertakes; and his possessing at the same time, the human nature, gives us the justest ground to trust, that with compassion and tenderness he undertakes the cause of mankind.

The discovery therefore of Christ's acting as our Intercessor in heaven, is in the highest degree favourable to religion and virtue. It is so far from being a doctrine repugnant to the reason, or to the natural ideas and notions of mankind, that it accords, as has been observed, in the general view of it, with what has ever been their wish and their hope; and the evangelical discovery of the true Mediator, while it banishes all the superstition and idolatry which heathen ignorance had attached to a mediatory worship,

fulfils to Christians every purpose both of encouragement and consolation. It encourages the humble virtuous man, who might be apt to look up with distrust to the awful Majesty of Heaven. It brings consolation to the penitent returning sinner, from the belief that unworthy as he is in himself, Christ the Saviour is worthy, by his powerful intercession, to procure his salvation. — What plan of religion could have been given more suited than this to the circumstances of man, in his present state of weakness and infirmity? What more animating to every sincere worshipper? — Let us study to do our best; and if our endeavours be faithful, and our hearts be upright, we have an advocate with the Father in Heaven, on whose intercession we can rely; One *who is able to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God through him. We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* *

In the last place, our Saviour ascended into Heaven in order to exercise there the office of our King, as well as of our High Priest and Intercessor. His ascension was a solemn investiture in that royal authority with which he was to act as *Head of the Church* till the end of time. All power in Heaven and earth was committed to him. In token of his being the Sovereign of both worlds, in triumph he rose from his earthly grave, and in triumph ascended into Heaven. *Therefore let all the house of Israel*

* Heb. viii. 25. — iv. 15, 16.

know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ. * *I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.*†

This view of our Lord's ascension and exaltation obviously commands from all Christians, the most profound reverence and submission. No longer let the humble appearance he made on earth vilify him to our apprehension. Never let the consideration of his grace and goodness as our Intercessor in heaven, be separated from the thoughts of that awful Majesty with which his ascension clothes him. With impunity none can offend him. If all the heavenly hosts adore him, if the whole universe obey him, what must be the fate of those, who, being of all creatures the most highly indebted to his goodness, revolt against his government, and refuse obedience to his laws?

But while with awe and reverence the ascension and regal character of our Saviour is fitted to inspire us, it communicates also the highest satisfaction and comfort to our hearts. *Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.* ‡ They have a Sovereign to whose protection they can, with firm trust, commit all their interests in life and death. There is no temptation under which his grace cannot be sufficient for them; no distress, from which it is not in his power to deliver them; no darkness but he can enlighten by a ray sent down from his eternal throne. *Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.* ‖ From that eminence of celestial glory in which he resides, he beholds and remarks whatever is carried on through-

* Acts, ii. 36. † Psalm ii. 6. 8. ‡ Psalm cxlix. 2.
‖ Matth. xxviii. 20.

out all his dominions. No secret conspiracy can escape his view; no fraud of wicked men or evil spirits can baffle his designs. *The heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. Kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed. But he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision.* As his watchful eye is ever open to observe, so his almighty arm is ever extended to guard his church and people.—— The same characters of wisdom and power, of justice and mercy, which we ascribe to the Providence and dominion of God the Father, belong, in their fullest extent, to the kingdom and government of Christ the Son of God. This peculiar satisfaction his government affords us, that in the midst of sovereign authority, we know that he still retains the same mild and compassionate spirit, which he showed as our High Priest. The meanest of his subjects is not overlooked by him. The inhabitant of the most obscure cottage, equally as the possessor of the most splendid palace, dwells under his protection. He listens to the prayer of the poor, and despises not the services they yield him. The *widow's mite* is in his sight an acceptable offering; and even *a cup of cold water given to a disciple in his name* passes not without its reward.—— Hence the characters of his regal administration cannot be better described than in the beautiful language of the prophetical Psalmist; *He shall judge the people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment. The righteous shall flourish in his days. He shall save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor. He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. His name shall*

*endure for ever. It shall be continued as long as the sun. Men shall be blessed in him; and all nations shall call him blessed.**

We have now under several views considered the ascension of Christ, and the important purposes which were answered by it. In going along, I have pointed out some of the chief effects which ought to be produced on us by this object of our faith. Much more might be said on this subject, did the bounds of a discourse permit it. One improvement of the subject which the sacred writers often point out, must not be forgotten. *If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.* † A certain conformity with Christ, their great leader, in all the circumstances of his history is in Scripture exacted from Christians. As they must *die with him to sin*, they must *rise with him unto newness of life;* and with him ascend in heart to heaven, and dwell in their affections where he is. The elevated hopes which Christ, by his resurrection and ascension, has set before us ought to inspire Christians with suitable elevation of sentiment above this present world.—As Christ *is in you the hope of glory, let every one who hath this hope in him, purify himself as Christ is pure.* ‡ Let not the corrupt pleasures of this world debase you. Let not its terrors deject you. But in your whole conduct, let that dignity and equanimity appear, which belongs to those who have such high connections. Christ, as your *forerunner*, hath enter-

* Psalm lxxii. † Coloss. iii. 1, 2. ‡ 1 John, iii. 3.

ed into the highest heavens; Him, it is your part to follow, in the paths of piety and virtue. In those paths proceed with perseverance and constancy, animated by those words of your departing Redeemer, which ought ever to dwell in your remembrance; *Go to my brethren, and say to them I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.* *

* John, xx. 17.—xiv. 2, 3.

SERMON LXXXVI.

On a peaceable Disposition.

Romans, xii. 18.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

IT cannot but occur to every one who has read the New Testament, even in a cursory manner, that there is nothing more warmly and more frequently inculcated in it, than peace and love, union and good understanding among men. Were a person to form to himself an idea of the state of the Christian world, merely from reading our sacred books, and thence inferring how they would live who believed those books to be Divine, he would draw, in his fancy, the fairest picture of a happy society: he would expect to meet with nothing but concord, harmony, and order; and to find the voice of clamour and contention for ever silent. But were such a person, fond to be himself a witness and a partaker of such a blissful state, to come amongst us from afar, how miserably, alas! would he be disappointed, when in the actual conduct of Christians he discovered so little correspondence with the mild and peaceful genius of their professed religion; when he saw the fierce spirit of contention often raging unrestrained in public; and in private, the intercourse of men

embittered, and society disordered and convulsed with quarrels about trifles? Too justly might he carry away with him this opprobrious report, that surely those Christians have no belief in that religion they profess to hold sacred, seeing their practice so openly contradicts it.

In order to prevent, as much as we can, this reproach from attaching to us, let us now set ourselves to consider seriously the importance and the advantages of *living peaceably with all men.*—— This duty may be thought by some to possess a low rank among the Christian virtues, and the phrase a *peaceable man*, to express no more than a very inferior character. I admit that gentleness, candour, sensibility, and friendship *, express a higher degree of refinement and improvement in the disposition: and that a good Christian ought to be distinguished by active benevolence, and zeal for remedying the miseries and promoting the felicity of others. But let it be remembered, that the love of peace is the foundation of all those virtues. It is the first article in the great Christian doctrine of charity; and its obligation is strict, in proportion as its importance is obvious. *Blessed are the peace makers; for they shall be called the children of God.*† — I shall first show what is included in the precept of *living peaceably with all men;* and next, what arguments recommend our obedience to this precept.

I. This precept implies, in the first place, a sacred regard to the rules of justice, in rendering to every man what is his due. Without this first principle,

* Vide Discourses on these virtues in the preceding Volumes.

† Matth. v. 9.

there can be no friendly commerce among mankind. Justice is the basis on which all society rests. Throw down its obligation, and at that instant you banish peace from the earth; you let rapine loose, and involve all the tribes of men in perpetual hostility and war. To live peaceably, therefore, requires, as its first condition, that we content ourselves with what is our own, and never seek to encroach on the just rights of our neighbour; that in our dealings, we take no unfair advantage; but conscientiously adhere to the great rule of doing to others, according as we wish they should do to us. It supposes that we never knowingly abet a wrong cause, nor espouse an unjust side, but always give our countenance to what is fair and equal. We are never to disturb any man in the enjoyment of his lawful pleasure; nor to hinder him from advancing his lawful profit. But under a sense of our natural equality, and of that mutual relation which connects us together as men, we are to carry on our private interest in consistency with what is requisite for general order and good. *Render tribute to whom tribute is due; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Covet not what is thy brother's. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.*

In the second place, the duty of living peaceably, not only prohibits all acts of open injustice, but requires us carefully to avoid giving unnecessary provocation or offence to others. When we consider from what small beginnings discord often arises, and to what astonishing heights from such beginnings it will grow, we will see much cause to watch with care over our words and actions, in our intercourse

with the world. It ought to be an object of attention so to behave, as never needlessly to exasperate the passions of others. In particular, we are to guard against all improper liberties of speech, and contumelious reflections on persons and characters. —— The man of peace is mild in his demeanor and inoffensive in his discourse. He appears to despise no man. He is not fond of contradicting and opposing, and is always averse to censure and to blame. He never erects himself into the character of a dictator in society. He never officiously seeks to intermeddle in the affairs of others, nor to pry into their secrets; and avoids every occasion of disturbing the good-will which men appear to bear to one another. —— Opposite to this, stands the character of the man of unpeaceable and quarrelsome spirit; who, himself easily provoked by every trifle, is continually offending and provoking others by the harshness of his behaviour. He is loud in his censures, positive in his opinions, and impatient of all contradiction. He is a *busy body in other men's matters;* descants on their characters, inquires into their conduct, and on the authority of his own suspicions, assigns what motives he pleases to their actions. Into the violence of party-spirit, he never fails to enter deeply; and confidently ascribes the worst principles to all who differ from him in opinion. — Such persons are the pests of society, and the troublers of all good order in human life. *Let every man study to be quiet,* says the Apostle, *and to do his own business. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.**

* 1 Thes. iv. 11. Rom. xiv. 4.

In the third place, the study of peace requires, that on some occasions we scruple not to give up our own opinion, or even to depart from our strict right, for the sake of peace. — At the same time, for preventing mistakes on this subject, it is proper to observe, that a tame submission to violence and wrongs, is not required by religion. We are not to imagine, that the love of peace is only another name for cowardice; or that it suppresses every proper exertion of a manly spirit. The expressions employed in the text, *if it be possible, as much as lieth in you*, plainly insinuate, that there are cases in which it may not be in our power to *live peaceably with all men*. Every man is allowed to feel what is due to himself and his own character, and is entitled to support properly his own rights. In many cases, the welfare of society requires that the attacks of the violent be checked and resisted. — What belongs to a good and a wise man is, to look forward coolly to the effects that are likely to follow the rigorous prosecution of any private rights of his own. If these appear to be pregnant with mischiefs to the society with which he is connected, in a much greater proportion than any advantage they can bring to himself, it then becomes his duty rather quietly to suffer wrong, than to kindle the flames of lasting discord. But how many are there, who having once begun a claim, espoused a side, or engaged in a controversy, are determined to pursue it to the last, let the consequences be what they will? False notions of honour are brought in to justify their passions. Pride will not allow them to yield, or to make the least concession, when the true point of honour would have led to generous acknowledgments

and condescension. They never make the first advances to returning reconciliation and peace. They are haughty in their claims, and require great submission before they can be appeased. —— The lover of peace, on the other hand, looks upon men and manners in a milder and softer light. He views them with a philosophic, or rather a Christian eye. Conscious that he himself has been often in the wrong; sensible that offence is frequently thought to be given where no injury was intended; knowing that all men are liable to be misled by false reports into unjust suspicions of their neighbours; he can pass over many things without disturbance or emotion, which in more combustible tempers, would kindle a flame. In all public matters in which he is engaged, he will not be pertinaciously adhesive to every measure which he has once proposed, as if his honour were necessarily engaged to carry it through. If he see the passions of men beginning to rise and swell, he will endeavour to allay the growing storm. He will give up his favourite schemes, he will yield to an opponent, rather than become the cause of violent embroilments; and, next to religion and a good conscience, the cause of peace and union will be to him most sacred and dear.

In the fourth place, our study of peace, in order to be effectual, must be of an extensive nature, it must not be limited to those with whom by interest, by good opinion, or by equality of station, we are connected. *Live peaceably with all men*, says the Apostle. No man is to be contemned because he is mean, or to be treated with incivility because he is one in whom we have no concern. Even to those whom we account

bad men, the obligation of living at peace extends. This is not inconsistent with that just indignation which we ought to bear against their crimes. Without entering into any close connection with them, without admitting them to be our friends and companions, it is certainly possible to live amongst them in a peaceable manner. Human society is at present composed of a confused mixture of good and evil men; and from our imperfect knowledge of characters, it is often not easy to distinguish the one class of men from the other. We are commonly prejudiced in favour of those who concur with us in our modes of thinking; and are prone to look with an evil eye on those who differ from us in subjects of importance. But if all the supposed blemishes of those with whom we differ in opinion; if the heretical doctrines which we ascribe to them, or the bad principles with which we charge them, were sufficient to justify the breach of peace, very little harmonious correspondence would remain among men. Appearances of religious zeal have been too often employed to cover the pride and ill-nature of turbulent persons.——The man of peace will bear with many whose opinions or practices he dislikes, without an open and violent rupture. He will consider it as his duty to gain upon them by mildness, and to reclaim them as far as he can from what is evil, by calm persuasion, rather than to attempt reforming them by acrimony and censure.——Neither indeed is it every man's office to set up for a reformer of the world. Every man, it is true, is bound to promote reformation by his personal example. But if he assume a superiority to which he has no title; and, with rude and indiscreet zeal, administer reproofs, and thrust himself forward into

the concerns of others, he is likely to do much more hurt than good; to break the peace of the world, without doing service to the cause of true religion.

If it thus appears to be our duty to extend our study of peace throughout the wide sphere of all who are around us, it will naturally occur that there is a certain narrower sphere within which this study ought to be particularly cultivated; towards all those, I mean, with whom Nature or Providence has joined us in close union, whether by bonds of friendship, kindred, and relation, or by the nearer ties of domestic and family connection. There, it most highly concerns every one to put in practice all the parts of that peaceable and amicable behaviour which I before have described; to guard against every occasion of provocation and offence; to overlook accidental starts of ill-humour; to put the most favourable interpretation on words and actions. The closer that men are brought together, they must unavoidably rub, at times, the more on one another. The most delicate attentions are requisite, of course, for preventing tempers being ruffled, and peace being broken, by those slight failings from which none are exempt. It is within the circle of domestic life, that the character of the man of peace will be particularly distinguished as amiable; and where he will most comfortably enjoy the fruits of his happy disposition.

Having now explained the precept in the text, and shown what is included in living peaceably with all men, I come next to suggest some considerations for recommending this peaceable disposition.

Let us recollect, in the first place, as a bond of union and peace, the natural relation which subsists among us all as men, sprung from one Father, connected by one common nature, and by fellowship in the same common necessities and wants; connected as Christians closer still, by acknowledgment of the same Lord, and participation of the same Divine hopes. Ought lesser differences altogether to divide and estrange those from one another, whom such ancient and sacred bonds unite? In all other cases the remembrance of kindred, or brotherhood, of a common parent, and common family, tends to soften the harsher feelings, and often has influence, when feuds arise, to melt and overcome the heart. Why should not a remembrance of the same kind have some effect with respect to the great brotherhood of mankind?——How unnatural and shocking is it, if, on occasion of some angry expression or trifling affront, to which sudden passion or mistaken report has given rise, a man shall deliberately go forth with the barbarous purpose of plunging his sword into his brother's breast? What a reproach to reason and humanity, that a ridiculous idea of honour, derived from times of Gothic grossness and ignorance, should stain the annals of modern life with so many tragical scenes of horror!

Let the sentiment of our natural connection with each other as men, dispose us the more to peace, from a reflection on our common failings, and the mutual allowances which those failings oblige us to make. A sense of equity should here arise, to prompt forbearance and forgiveness. Were there any man who could say that he had never, in the course of his life, suffered himself to be transported by

passion, or given just ground of offence to any one, such a man might have some plea for impatience when he received from others unreasonable treatment. But if no such perfectly unexceptionable characters are to be found, how unjust is it not to give to others those allowances which we, in our turn, must claim from them? — To our own failings, we are always blind. Our pride and self-conceit render us quarrelsome and contentious, by nourishing a weak and childish sensibility to every fancied point of our own honour or interest, while they shut up all regard to the honour or interest of our brethren. From the high region of imaginary self-estimation, let us descend to our own just and proper level. Let us calmly reflect on the place we hold in society, and on the justice that is due to others. From such reflections we will learn to be more humble in our claims, and more moderate in our pretensions; and many of the causes of animosity and contention will die away.

Let us consider, in the next place, how trifling and inconsiderable, for the most part, the causes are of contention and discord among mankind, and how much they deserve to be overlooked by the wise and the good. When we view the eagerness with which contests are agitated in society, and look to the bitterness and wrath they so oft occasion, one would think that all were at stake, and that there could be no life, no happiness on earth, unless to him who was victorious in the contest. And yet, in how few instances has there been any just ground for this mighty ferment of spirits? — You have been slighted, perhaps, by a superior; you have been ungratefully

treated by a friend; a rival has over-reached you by fraud, or overcome you by more powerful interest. Amidst the bustle of life, amidst the interfering and crossing of various pursuits and interests, are not such incidents to be expected by every one? Ought you not to have been prepared for encountering them without passion or violence, as evils belonging to the common lot of humanity? As light bodies are shaken and torn by every breath of wind, while those that are solid resist the blast; so it is only the little and mean mind that loses possession of itself on every trifling provocation; while a great and firm spirit keep its place, and rests on a basis of its own, unshaken by the common disturbances of life. — Of what small moment to your real happiness, are many of those injuries which draw forth your resentment? They may affect in some degree your worldly interests; but can they affect your true honour as a man? Can they deprive you of peace of conscience, of the satisfaction of having acted a right part, of the pleasing sense of being esteemed by men, and the hope of being rewarded by God, for your generosity and forgiveness? — In the moments of eager contention all is magnified and distorted in its appearance. A false light is thrown on every object. Nothing appears to be what it really is. But let the hour of violence pass over; let the course of time bring forward recollection and calmness, and you will wonder at your former violence. Objects which once were so formidable, will then have disappeared. A new scene has taken place; and the grounds of former contention will seem as dreams of the night, which have passed away. — Act then now the part of a man, by anticipating that period of

coolness, which time will certainly bring. You will then cease to break the peace of society with your angry contentions. You will show that magnanimity which belongs to those who depend not for their happiness merely on the occurrences of the world. *He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.* *

Let us now consider the different consequences of a contentious spirit, and of a peaceable disposition, with respect to our happiness and enjoyment. The foundation of happiness must certainly be laid within our breasts. If one be pained and uneasy there, external circumstances, how flourishing soever, avail him nothing: And what feelings are more uneasy and painful than the workings of sour and angry passions? Great and manifold as the natural and unavoidable distresses of our present state are, they are small in comparison of the evils which men bring upon themselves, and bring upon one another, by variance and discord. I speak not now of public calamities, of faction and ambition raging through the world, and hostile armies laying waste the earth with desolation and bloodshed. Confining our views solely to private life, how miserably is all its comfort and order destroyed by those jealousies, feuds, and animosities, that so often break the peace of families, tear asunder the bonds of friendship, and poison all that social intercourse which men were formed to entertain with one another? From a small chink which some rude hand has opened, the bitter waters of strife easily flow. But of this we may be assured, that a full portion of

* Prov. xvi. 32.

their bitterness shall be tasted by him who has let them forth. Never was any man active in disquieting others, who did not at the same time disquiet himself. While the tempest which he has raised may be bursting on his neighbour, he will be obliged to feel the hurricane raging in his own breast; and from his restlessness, impatience, and eagerness, joined with anxious trepidations and fears, will often suffer more than all that he can inflict on his adversary.

From such painful sensations the man of peace is free. A mild, unruffled, self-possessing mind is a blessing more important to real felicity, than all that can be gained by the triumphant issue of some violent contest. Never was a truer axiom pronounced by any mouth, than what was uttered by the wise man of old; *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.** With a scanty provision of the good things of this world, a wise man may be contented and happy; but without peace, all the luxuries of the rich lose their relish. — While among the sons of strife all is tempestuous and loud; the smooth stream, the serene atmosphere, the mild zephyr, are the proper emblems of a gentle temper, and a peaceable life. Nor is this merely a poetical allusion. The ordinary language of discourse, where the terms are so often employed of a storm of passion; a calm mind, a rough or a fiery temper, plainly show that all men are sensible of some analogy between a peaceable disposition, and those scenes of external nature that are universally agreeable and pleasant. The condition of those who are living in unity with their brethren, is likened by

* Prov. xv. 17.

the Psalmist David *to the dew of Hermon; the dew that descended on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.**

While the man of this disposition is happy within himself, let it not be forgotten, that he is at the same time gaining on all around him. From the quarrelsome and rude, all men naturally recoil; and except when necessity obliges them, avoid their intercourse. But the lover of peace conciliates general good-will; and is both respected and beloved. Though no absolute security can be devised against the malice and injustice of the world, yet for the most part, it will be found that there is no more effectual guard against violence, no surer road to a safe enjoyment of life, than an established character for benignity and regard to peace. The man of this character, if unjustly attacked, will have many to defend him and take his part. In his prosperity he will be unenvied, and his misfortunes will be alleviated by general sympathy.

Let us consider, in the last place, how strongly the precept in the text is enforced by the most sacred religious obligations. You all know what a high place, charity, under all its forms of meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness, possesses in the Christian system. To bring authorities in support of this, were to recite a great part of the New Testament before you. The God whom we worship, is known by the title of *the God of Peace*. That evil spirit who is opposite to him, is described with all the characters

* Psalm cxxxiii. 3.

which express malignity; *the enemy, the accuser, the liar, the destroyer.* When Christ came into the world as our Saviour, he is styled the Prince of Peace. The blessings which were proclaimed at his birth were, *peace upon earth, and good-will towards men.* The whole of his life was one continued exemplification of all the virtues that characterise the meek, the peaceable and forgiving spirit. Never was any one's temper tried by so many and so great provocations; never did any one retain under these provocations such a calm and unruffled tenour of mind; insomuch that the Apostle Paul, on an occasion of earnest intreaty to the Corinthians, *beseeches them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ,* as the most noted and well-known parts of his character.* What can be said higher of any virtue than that it is the quality, under the denomination of which the Son of God chose to be known when he dwelt on earth? Let us add, that it is also the distinguishing character of God's own Spirit. The Holy Ghost is called the *Spirit of peace. Meekness, gentleness, and long suffering,* are expressly denominated *his fruits;* and on a certain memorable occasion, his appearance was marked with signals that express the mild and quiet spirit as distinguished from violence. When Elijah the great prophet was called to go forth and stand before the Lord, *behold, a great and strong wind rent the mountains, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After that, there came forth a still small voice.*

* 2 Corinth. x. 1.

When Elijah heard it, he knew the symbol of God's spirit; *he wrapped his face in his mantle,* and worshipped.*

After so many testimonies given by the sacred writings to the high importance of a meek and peaceable spirit, what shall we think of those, who in their system of religion, make slight account of this virtue; who are ready to quarrel with others on the most trifling occasions; who are continually disquieting their families by peevishness and ill-humour; and by malignant reports, raising dissension among friends and neighbours? Can any claims to sound belief, or any supposed attainments of grace, supply the defect of so cardinal a virtue as charity and love?—— Let such persons particularly bethink themselves how little the spirit which they possess, fits them for the kingdom of heaven, or rather how far it removes them from the just hope of ever entering into it. Hell is the proper region of enmity and strife. There dwell unpeaceable and fiery spirits, in the midst of mutual hatred, wrath, and tumult. But the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of peace. There, *charity never faileth.* There reigneth the God of love; and, in his presence, all the blessed inhabitants are of one heart and one soul. No string can ever be heard to jar in that celestial harmony: and therefore the contentious and violent are, both by their own nature and by God's decree, for ever excluded from the heavenly society. — As the best preparation for those blessed mansions, let us ever keep in view that direction given by an Apostle, *Follow peace with all men, and*

* 1 Kings, xix. 11, 12, 13.

*holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.** To the cultivation of amity and *peace* in all our social intercourse, let us join *holiness;* that is, piety, and active virtue; and thus we shall pass our days comfortably and honourably on earth, and at the conclusion of our days be admitted to dwell among saints and angels, and *to see the Lord.*

* Heb. xii. 14.

SERMON LXXXVII.

On Religious Joy, as giving Strength and Support to Virtue.

Nehemiah, viii. 10.

—— *The joy of the Lord is your strength.*

NEHEMIAH, the governor of Jerusalem, having assembled the people of Israel immediately after their return from the captivity of Babylon, made the book of the law be brought forth and read before them. On hearing the words of the book of the law, we are informed that *all the people wept;* humbled and cast down by the sense of their present weak and forlorn condition, compared with the flourishing state of their ancestors. Nehemiah sought to raise their spirits from this dejection; and exhorts them to prepare themselves for serving the God of their fathers with a cheerful mind, *for*, says he, *the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

Abstracted from the occasion on which the words were spoken, they contained an important truth, which I now purpose to illustrate; that to the nature of true religion there belongs an inward joy, which animates, strengthens, and supports virtue. The illustration of this position will require that I should show, in the first place, that in the practice of religious duties there is found an inward joy, here styled the

joy of the Lord; and in the next place, that this joy is justly denominated the *strength* of the righteous.

I. Joy is a word of various signification. By men of the world, it is often used to express those flashes of mirth which arise from irregular indulgencies of social pleasure; and of which it is said by the wise man, that in such *laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.** It will be easily understood that the *joy* here mentioned partakes of nothing a-kin to this; but signifies a tranquil and placid joy, an inward complacency and satisfaction, accompanying the practice of virtue, and the discharge of every part of our duty. A joy of this kind is what we assert to belong to every part of religion; to characterise religion wherever it is genuine, and to be essential to its nature. — In order to ascertain this, let us consider the disposition of a good man with respect to God; with respect to his neighbours; and with respect to the government of his own mind.

When we consider in what manner religion requires that a good man should stand affected towards God, it will presently appear that rational enlightened piety opens such views of him as must communicate joy. It presents him, not as an awful unknown Sovereign, but as the Father of the universe, the Lover and Protector of righteousness, under whose government all the interests of the virtuous are safe. With delight the good man traces the Creator throughout all his works, and beholds them every where reflecting some image of his supreme perfec-

* Prov. xiv. 13.

tion. In the morning dawn, the noon-tide glory, and the evening shade; in the fields, the mountains, and the flood, where worldly men behold nothing but a dead uninteresting scene; every object is enlivened and animated to him by the presence of God. Amidst that Divine presence he dwells with reverence but without terror. Conscious of the uprightness of his own intentions, and of the fidelity of his heart to God, he considers himself, by night and by day, as under the protection of an invisible guardian. *He lifts up his eyes to the hills from whence cometh his aid;* and commits himself without distrust to the *Keeper of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps.* He listens to the gracious promises of his word. With comfort he receives the declarations of his mercy to mankind, through a great Redeemer; in virtue of whose atonement provision is made for pardon to human infirmities, and for our reception in the end into a happier world. All the various devotional exercises of faith and trust in God, all the cordial effusions of love and gratitude to this Supreme Benefactor in the acts of prayer and praise, afford scope to those emotions of the heart, which are of the most pleasing kind; and which diffuse a gentle and softening tenderness over the affections. In a word, a truly pious man, who has always before him an object so sublime and interesting as this great Father of the universe, on whom his thoughts can dwell with satisfaction, may be truly said to partake highly in the *joy of the Lord.*

But it may here be objected, are there no mortifications and griefs that particularly belong to piety? What shall we say to the tear of repentance, and to that humiliation of confession and remorse, which may, at times, be incumbent on the most pious, in

this state of human infirmity?—To this I reply, first, that although there may be seasons of grief and dejection in a course of piety, yet this is not inconsistent with the joy of the Lord, being on the whole, the predominant character of a good man's state; as it is impossible that, during this life, perpetual brightness can remain in any quarter, without some dark cloud. But I must observe next, that even the penitential sorrows and relentings of a pious heart, are not without their own satisfactions. A certain degree of pleasure is mingled with the tears which the returning offender sheds, in the hours of compunction; the ingenuous contrition that he feels, relieves his heart, at the same time that it gives it pain. If we attend to the workings of human nature on other occasions, we shall find that it is no unusual thing for a secret mysterious pleasure to be mixed with painful feelings. This we all know to be the case in those exercises of pity and commiseration to which we are led by sympathy with the afflicted. We grieve and are pained for their distress; yet we choose to indulge that grief; satisfaction is felt in the indulgence; and we are unwillingly separated from the object which has occasioned this painful, but tender sympathy. A mixture somewhat similar, of pleasure and pain, takes place in the sentiments of penitential sorrow, which good men sometimes feel. In the midst of their distress, they are soothed by an internal consciousness, that they are affected as it becomes them to be; that they feel as they ought to feel; and they are gradually relieved by the hope rising in their breast of finding mercy and acceptance with their Creator and Redeemer. Where the mind is properly instructed in religion, it will not long be left

in a state of overwhelming dejection, but will return to tranquillity, and repossess again the *joy of the Lord.*

When we consider, next, the disposition of a good man towards his fellow-creatures, we shall find here the joy of the Lord exerting its influence fully. That mild and benevolent temper to which he is formed by virtue and piety; a temper that is free from envious and malignant passions, and that can look with the eye of candour and humanity on surrounding characters, is a constant spring of cheerfulness and serenity. Indeed, if there be joy at all in human life, it is, perhaps, in this state of the mind that it is most sensibly felt; and felt with the least check or allay. It is truly said, *to the wicked there is no peace.* In proportion as any one of the bad passions predominates in the breast, it never fails, in the same proportion, to corrode the heart, and to shed over all the comforts of life a poisonous and baneful influence. Whereas all those exercises of friendship, compassion, and generosity, which are essential to the disposition of a virtuous man, are to him lively enjoyments of pleasure in themselves, and increase the satisfaction which he tastes in all the other innocent pleasures of life. He knows that he enjoys them along with the good-will and the blessings of all to whom he has studied to do good. When he can cheer the dejected or gladden the sorrowful, he is cheered and gladdened himself. If his circumstances allow him not to do all the good he wishes to have done, yet in the consciousness of good intentions there is always an inward satisfaction; and in those lesser offices of kindness and humanity which are

within the sphere of every man to perform, he enjoys innumerable occasions of being pleased and happy.

WITH respect to that part of religion which consists in the government of a man's own mind, of his passions and desires, it may be thought that much joy is not to be expected. For there religion appears to lay on a severe and restraining hand. Strict temperance and self-denial are often requisite; and much is on some occasions abridged, of what is apt to be reckoned the full and free enjoyment of life. Yet, here also it will be found, that the *joy of the Lord* takes place. To a person just reclaimed from the excesses of sensual indulgence, the restraints imposed by virtue will, at first, appear uncouth and mortifying. But let him begin to be accustomed to a regular life, and his taste will soon be rectified, and his feelings will change. In purity, temperance, and self-government, there is found a satisfaction in the mind, similar to what results from the enjoyment of perfect health in the body. A man is then conscious that all is sound within. There is nothing that gnaws his spirit; that makes him ashamed of himself; or discomposes his calm and orderly enjoyment of life. His conscience testifies that he is acting honourably. He enjoys the satisfaction of being master of himself. He feels that no man can accuse him of degrading his character by base pleasures or low pursuits; and knows that he will be honoured and esteemed by those whose honour and esteem he would most desire; all which are sensations most pleasing and gratifying to every human heart.

From this slight sketch it plainly appears that there is an inward satisfaction, justly termed *the joy of the Lord*, which runs through all the parts of religion. This is a very different view of religion from what is entertained by those who consider it as a state of perpetual penance; to which its votaries unwillingly submit, merely from the dread of punishment in hell; and who bargain for the rewards of another world, by a renunciation of all that is agreeable or comfortable to man in this world. Such conceptions of religion are contradicted by the experience of every truly virtuous man, and are directly opposite to the views of religion given us in the word of God; wherein its ways are termed *ways of pleasantness and paths of peace*: and where we are assured that *in the keeping of God's commands*, there is an immediate *great reward*.

But what it concerns us at present to remark is, that some experience of this *joy of the Lord* which I have described, enters as an essential part into the character of every good man. In proportion to the degree of his goodness, to his improvement and progress in virtue, will be the degree of his participation in the pleasure and joy of religion. But wherever such pleasure is entirely unknown; wherever there is no satisfaction and delight in the discharge of virtuous duties, there we are obliged to conclude, that religion does not subsist in its genuine state. It is either a sanctimonious show merely; a forced appearance of piety and virtue, tinctured, perhaps, with some deep shades of superstition; or at best, it is religion in its most weak and imperfect state. It is deficient in the regeneration of the heart. The man himself is in a divided and hovering state, between

two opposite principles of action; partly affecting to be obedient to God's commands, and partly a slave to the world. The truth and importance of this observation will more fully appear, when we proceed to what was proposed for the

IId Head of discourse — to show in what respects the joy of the Lord is justly said to be *the strength of the righteous.*

In the first place, it is the animating principle of virtue; it supports its influence and assists it in becoming both persevering and progressive. Experience may teach us that few undertakings are lasting or successful, which are accompanied with no pleasure. If a man's religion be considered merely as a task prescribed to him, which he feels burdensome and oppressive, it is not likely that he will long constrain himself to act against the bent of inclination. It is not until he feels somewhat within him which attracts him to his duty, that he can be expected to be constant and zealous in the performance of it. Was it ever found that a person advanced far in any art or study, whether of the liberal or mechanical kind, in which he had no pleasure, to which he had no heart, but which, from motives merely of interest or fear, he was compelled to undertake? Is it then to be thought that religion will prove the only exception to what holds so generally, and will continue an actuating principle of conduct, whether we love it for its own sake, or not? It is true, that a sense of duty may sometimes exercise its authority, though there be no sensations of pleasure to assist it. Belief of those religious principles in which we were educated, and dread of

future punishment, will, in cases where no strong temptation assails us, restrain from the commission of atrocious crimes, and produce some decent regularity of external conduct. But on occasions when inclination or interest prompt to some transgression of virtue, which safety or secrecy encourages, and which the example of the world seems to countenance; when the present advantage or pleasure appears to be all on one side, and no satisfaction arises to counterbalance it on the other; is it to be thought that conscience will then stand its ground, with one who never was attached to virtue on its own account, and never experienced any joy in following its dictates?——But these are the occasions when the *joy of the Lord* proves the *strength of the righteous man.* Accustomed to take pleasure in doing his duty; accustomed to look up to God with delight and complacency, and to feel himself happy in all the offices of kindness and humanity to men around him; accustomed to rejoice in a clear conscience, in a pure heart, and the hope of heavenly bliss; he cannot think of parting with such satisfactions for the sake of any worldly bribe. There is something within his heart, that pleads for religion and virtue. He has seen their beauty; he has tasted their sweetness; and having such pleasures within himself, to oppose to all the pleasures of sin, he is enabled to maintain his integrity inviolate; or if in any degree he has deviated from it, speedy remorse is awakened, and he cannot be satisfied with himself till he returns back to the right path. Thus, through the *joy of the Lord*, religion becomes in him *the spirit of love, and power, and of a sound mind.* * It is the *peace of God which*

* 2 Tim. i. 7.

passeth understanding, keeping his mind and heart. * It is the *path of the just which is as the light, shining more and more unto the perfect day.*

In the next place, the joy of the Lord is the *strength of the righteous*, as it is their great support under the discouragements and trials of life. In the days of their ease and prosperity, it guards them, as has been shown, against the temptations of vice; and in the general tenor of conduct attaches them to the side of virtue, and when the evil days come, wherein they shall have no pleasure from the world, it supplies them with pleasures of another kind, to preserve them from improper despondency, or from entering into evil discourses for the sake of relief. — A good man's friends may forsake him; or may die, and leave him to mourn. His fortune may fail, or his health decay. Calumny and reproach may unjustly attack his character. In circumstances of this kind, where worldly men become peevish, dispirited, and fretful, he who is acquainted with the pleasures of religion and virtue, can possess himself calm and undisturbed. He has resources within unknown to the world, whence light *arises to him in darkness*. From the gloom or turbulence of external evils, he can retreat to the enjoyment of his own mind. In the exercises of devotion, his heart is elevated, and the cares of the world are forgotten. In his regular discharge of all the social duties of life, he finds cheerfulness and pleasure. Hence his temper is not soured. He accuses neither God nor man for the unavoidable misfortunes of life. He submits with patience to the

* Philipp. iv. 7.

common lot; looking forward with good hope to better days; retaining always honourable thoughts of God's providence, and sentiments of candour towards men.——In this manner, his experience of the joy of the Lord becomes *his strength*; as infusing into his mind a principle of firmness and stability, and enabling him, in every situation of fortune, to continue the same.

From the view which we have now taken of the subject, it must clearly appear, that to every one who wishes to possess the spirit, and to support the character of genuine goodness and virtue, it is an object most desirable and important, to acquire a prevailing relish for the pleasures of religion. As this is a most important object, so also it is an attainable one by every man whose intentions are sincerely upright. For let it be remembered, that the *joy of the Lord*, which I have described as *the strength of the righteous*, is not to be understood as a privilege belonging only to saints of the highest order, who can assuredly trust to their being the chosen of God. It is not to be understood of high raptures, and transports of religious fervour. It is not even confined to the sole pleasures or intercourse with God in devotion; though assuredly these constitute one great part of the *joy of the Lord*, and are auxiliary to its exercises on every other occasion. The *joy of the Lord* is to be understood of that joy, which accompanies the whole of religious and virtuous practice; that satisfaction which a good man feels in the discharge of his duty, which accompanies the performance of all the offices which belong to the station of life in which he is placed; whether these be of a

public nature or private, social or domestic, or relating particularly to the exercises of religious worship and devotion.

To attain this spirit, of considering the discharge of our duty as our pleasure and happiness, is certainly not incompatible with our present state of infirmity. It is no more than what good men have often attained, and have testified of it; that *their delight was in the law of God*; that his *statutes were sweet to their taste*: that *they had taken them as an heritage for ever, for they were the rejoicing of their heart. I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.** — According to the proficiency which men have made in virtue, will be the degree of satisfaction which they receive from the performance of it; but where no pleasures or satisfactions of this kind are known, men have much ground to distrust their pretensions to godliness or Christianity.

It is therefore of high importance, that all proper means be employed to form our internal taste to a proper relish for this joy of the Lord. For it is not to be dissembled, that much is against us in our endeavours to have our disposition formed for relishing virtuous pleasures. We breathe in this world a sort of vitiated air, very unfriendly to the health and soundness of all our moral feelings. From our earliest youth we are bred up in admiration of the external advantages of fortune; and are accustomed to hear them extolled as the only real and substantial goods. We must therefore begin by studying to correct these false ideas, and persuading ourselves that there are other things besides riches, honours,

* Psalm xl. 8. — cxix. 111.

and sensual pleasures, that are good for man; that there are joys of a spiritual and intellectual nature, which directly affect the mind and heart, and which confer a satisfaction both more refined and more lasting than any worldly circumstances can confer. In order to have a fair trial of the value and effect of those spiritual enjoyments, we must forbear polluting ourselves with gross and guilty pleasures; we must even refrain from indulging worldly pleasures that appear innocent in a profuse and intemperate degree, lest they sensualise and debase our feelings. By preserving a wise and manly temperance in lower pleasures and pursuits, we will then allow those of a higher kind to occupy their proper place; and shall be in a situation fairly to compare the pure sensations of pleasure which arise from the consciousness of discharging our duty, with the transient and turbid gratifications of sin and the world. To such endeavours of our own, for rectifying and improving our taste of pleasure, let us join frequent and fervent prayer to God, that he may enlighten and reform our hearts; and by his spirit, communicate that joy to our souls, which descends from him, and which he has annexed to every part of religion and virtue as the *strength of the righteous.*

SERMON LXXXVIII.

On the Folly of the Wisdom of the World.

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1 Corinth. iii. 19.

The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

THE judgment which we form of ourselves often differs widely from that which is formed of us by God, whose judgment alone is always conformable to the truth. In our opinion of the abilities which we imagine ourselves to possess, there is always much self-flattery; and in the happiness which we expect to enjoy in this world, there is always much deceit. As there is a worldly happiness, which God perceives to be no other than concealed misery; as there is a worldly honour, which in his estimation is reproach; so, as the text informs us, there is a *wisdom of this world*, which *is foolishness with God.* Assuredly there is nothing in which it imports us more that our judgment should agree with the truth, than in what relates to wisdom. It is the qualification upon which every man is inclined to value himself, more than on any other. They who can with patience suffer imputations on other parts of their character, are ready to lose their temper, and to feel sore and hurt when they are attacked for deficiency in prudence and judgment. Wisdom is justly considered as the guide of conduct. If any capital errors shall take place respecting it; if one shall

mistake that for wisdom which at bottom is mere folly; such a mistake will pervert the first principles of conduct, and be perpetually misleading a man through the whole of life. — As the text plainly intimates that this mistake does often take place in the world, and as it materially concerns us all to be on our guard against so great a danger, I shall endeavour to show, first, what the nature and spirit of that *wisdom of the world* is, which is here condemned; and next, in what sense and on what account it is styled *foolishness with God.*

I. Let us consider the nature of that wisdom which is reprobated in the text as foolishness with God. It is styled the *wisdom of this world;* that is, the wisdom which is most current, and most prized in this world; the wisdom which particularly distinguishes the character of those who are commonly known by the name of *men of the world.* Its first and most noted distinction is, that its pursuits are confined entirely to the temporal advantages of the world. Spiritual blessings, or moral improvements, the man of this spirit rejects as a sort of airy unsubstantial enjoyments, which he leaves to the speculative and the simple; attaching himself wholly to what he reckons the only solid goods, the possession of riches and influence, of reputation and power, together with all the conveniences and pleasures which opulent rank or station can procure.

In pursuit of these favourite ends, he is not in the least scrupulous as to his choice of means. If he prefer those which are the fairest, it is not because they are fair, but because they seem to him most likely to prove successful. He is sensible that it is

for his interest to preserve decorums, and to stand well in the public opinion. Hence he is seldom an openly profligate man, or marked by any glaring enormities of conduct. In this respect, his character differs from that of those who are commonly called *men of pleasure*. Them he considers as a thoughtless, giddy herd, who are the victims of passion and momentary impulse. The thorough-bred man of the world is more steady and regular in his pursuits. He is, for the most part, composed in his manners, and decent in his vices. He will often find it expedient to be esteemed by the world as worthy and good. But to be thought good, answers his purpose much better than subjecting himself to become really such; and what he can conceal from the world, he conceives to be the same as if it had never been. —— Let me here remark in passing, that the character which I am now describing, is one less likely to be reclaimed and reformed, than that of those whom I mentioned above as the men of pleasure. With them, vice breaks forth in occasional fits and starts; with the other it grows up into a hardened and confirmed principle. In the midst of the gross irregularities of pleasure, circumstances often force remorse on the sinner's mind. Moments of compunction arise, which may be succeeded by conviction and reformation. But the cool and temperate plan of iniquity, on which the man of worldly wisdom proceeds, allows the voice of conscience to be longer silent. The alarm which it gives, is not so loud and violent as to awaken him at once from his evil courses, and instantly to prepare him for a better mind.

The man of the world is always a man of selfish and contracted disposition. Friends, country, duty,

honour, all disappear from his view, when his own interest is in question. He is of a hard heart; he chooses indeed to be so, lest at any time the unguarded effusions of kind affections should carry him beyond the line of worldly wisdom. The more thoroughly that the spirit of the world has taken possession of him, the circle of his affections becomes always the narrower. His family will perhaps find place, as connected with his own importance, and with his plans either of power or wealth; but all beyond that circle are excluded from any particular regard. It is his great principle never to embark seriously in any undertaking, from which he foresees no benefit likely to redound to himself. Public spirit he considers either as a mere chimera created by the simple, or a pretence employed by the artful for their own purpose. Judging of the rest of the world by what he feels within himself, he proceeds on the supposition that all men are carrying on interested designs of their own, and of course is ever on his guard against them. Hence to the cordialities of friendship he is an entire stranger; too much wrapt up in himself, indeed, to be a friend to any one, and if his prudence restrain him from being an open and violent enemy, yet he is always an unforgiving one.

Candour, openness, and simplicity of manners, are ridiculed by the man of this description, as implying mere ignorance of the world. Art and address are the qualities on which he values himself. For the most part, he would choose to supplant a rival by intrigue, rather than to overcome him by fair opposition. Indeed, what men call policy and knowledge of the world, is commonly no other thing than dissi-

mulation and insincerity. The world is a great school, where deceit in all its forms is one of the lessons that is first learned, and most eagerly caught by such as aspire to be proficients in worldly wisdom. A man of the world, in short, is one, who, upon any call of interest, flatters and deceives you; who can smile in your face, while he is contriving plans for your ruin; who upon no occasion thinks of what is right, or fit, or honourable; but only of what is expedient and useful to himself.

I HAVE dwelt the more fully on the delineation of this character, that each of us might learn whether there be any feature in it that applies to himself; as it is a character too frequently met with in the world, and not always so severely reprobated as it ought to be. Let me now ask, whether such a character as I have described be in any respect an amiable one? Is the man of the world, polished, and plausible, and courtly, as in his behaviour he may be, one whom you would choose for a companion and bosom friend? Would you wish him for a son, a brother, or a husband? Would you reckon yourself safe in confiding your interests to him, or entrusting him with your secrets? Nay, let me ask, if he be one whom in your hearts you respect and honour? His shrewdness and abilities you may perhaps admire; stand in awe of him you may; and, for the sake of advantage, may wish him to be on your side. But could you honour him as a parent, or venerate him as a magistrate; or would you wish to live under him as a sovereign? Of what real value then, let me ask, is that boasted wisdom of the world, which can neither conciliate love, nor produce trust, nor command inward respect?

—— At the same time, I admit that the man of the world may be a man of very considerable abilities. He may display talents of many different sorts. Besides art and sagacity, he may possess genius and learning; he may be distinguished for eloquence in supporting his own cause; he may have valour and courage to defend himself against his enemies. —— But observe, I entreat you, a consequence that follows. You see in this instance, that the most distinguished human abilities, when they are separated from virtue and moral worth, lose their chief eminence and lustre, and are deprived of all valuable efficacy. They dwindle into despicable talents, which have no power to command the hearts, nor to ensure the respect and honour of mankind. Let it be carefully observed, and always remembered, that integrity, probity, and moral worth, are essentially requisite to give the stamp of real excellence to any powers or abilities which the human mind can possess. —— Having now considered the nature and effect of worldly wisdom with respect to men, let us inquire,

II. How it stands with respect to God. It is said in the text, to be *foolishness with God.* It is so in three respects: It is contemptible in God's sight; it is baffled in its attempts by God; or, when its attempts are successful, they are allowed to produce nothing but disappointment and vanity.

First, it is contemptible in God's sight. Pleased and satisfied as the wise man of the world may be with himself, and honoured as he may fancy himself to be by the multitude, let him be mortified with

reflecting that, in the eye of him who is the Supreme Judge of all worth, his character is mean and wretched. That which God declares himself to love and honour, is *truth in the inward parts:* the fair, sincere, and candid mind. He who *walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness,* is the person who shall *abide in his tabernacle, and dwell in his holy hill.* When our blessed Lord designed to mark one of his followers with peculiar distinction and honour, he said of him, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile* * ; a character so directly the reverse of worldly wisdom, that from this circumstance alone you may judge in what rank that wisdom stood with him.

But it is not only from the declarations of the Scripture, but from the whole course of Providence, that we learn the contempt in which God holds the wisdom of the world. Who were they on whom he conferred the highest marks of distinction which ever honoured mankind; whom he singled out to be the companions of Christ, the workers of miracles, the publishers of everlasting happiness to mankind? Were they the wise men of the world, the refined, and the political, who were employed as the instruments of God on this great occasion? No: he chose a few plain, simple, undesigning men, in order to make foolish the *wisdom of the world,* and by their means to overthrow the establishments of the artful, the learned, and the mighty.—— To this day, God in the course of his Providence bestows those external advantages which the men of the world so earnestly pursue, with apparent disregard of worldly wisdom. He allows no fixed nor regular connection to subsist

* John, i. 47.

between an artful, political conduct, and riches, reputation, or honours; he allows them not this mark of value; he does not always give the race to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding; but, on the contrary, scatters the advantages of fortune with a promiscuous hand; and often allows them to be attained by the vilest and lowest of men, who neither by worldly wisdom, nor any other talent whatever, had the smallest title to deserve them.—Judge then, ye wise men of this world, whether your characters and pursuits be not most contemptible in God's sight, when you behold those spiritual blessings which he esteems withheld from you, and bestowed only on the good and the pious; and those worldly blessings which you covet, when at any time they are allowed to you, yet allowed only as a portion in common to you with the refuse of mankind, with many characters so infamous that you yourselves despise them?

In the *second* place, the wisdom of the world is *foolishness with God*, because it is baffled by him. Some triumphs he has occasionally allowed it to gain, in order to carry on some special purpose that his Providence had in view. Hence a splendid conqueror, a successful conspirator, dazzle at times the public eye, and attract imitators of their characters and exploits. But, if you extensively consult historical annals, and much more, if you will attentively consider what is known to happen in private life, you will find the examples to be few and rare, of wicked, unprincipled men attaining fully the accomplishment of their crafty designs.—It is true, that the justice of Heaven is not, in the

present state, fully manifested, by rendering to every man according to his deeds. But I believe it will be found by attentive observers, that there are two cases in which, perhaps more than in any other, the Divine government has, throughout all ages, rendered itself apparent and sensible to men. These are humbling the high imaginations of the proud, and taking the wise in their own craftiness. By many signal instances of the intervention of Providence in both these cases, God hath deeply marked the traces of an awful government, even in this introductory state; and forced a reverence of his justice upon the minds of men. As he will not permit any greatness to lift itself up against his power, so neither will he permit any art to prevail against his counsels. While the crafty project many a distant plan, and wind their way most warily and cunningly, as they think, to success; how often does the Almighty, by means of some slight and seemingly contingent event, stop the wheel at once from farther motion, and leave them to the bitterness of humbling disappointment? *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then,* it is immediately added, *shall he speak to them in wrath, and vex them in sore displeasure.** The edifice of crooked policy which they had erected against his decree, was an edifice of dust: no sooner does he blow upon it with the breath of his mouth than it falls to the ground. *The wicked are snared in their own devices. They are caught in the pit which their hands had digged. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations.*†

* Psalm ii. 4, 5. † Isaiah, xiv. 26.

In the *third* place, the wisdom of the world is *foolishness with God;* because, though it should be allowed by Providence to run without disturbance its fullest career, and to compass successfully whatever it had projected, yet it can produce nothing in the issue worthy of the pursuit of a truly wise man. It is a wisdom which overreaches and counteracts itself; and instead of expected happiness, ends in misery. — If the existence of another world be admitted, can he be accounted wise, who frames his conduct solely with a view to this world, and beyond it has nothing to look for but punishment? Is he a wise man, who exchanges that which is eternal, for that which is temporary; and though it were to gain the whole world, exposes himself to lose his own soul? — But laying another world out of the question, taking things on the footing of this life only, still it can be clearly shown, that the crooked wisdom of the world is no better than foolishness. For what is the amount of all that this wise man hath gained, or can gain, after all the toil he has undergone, and all the sacrifices he has made, in order to attain success? He has supplanted a rival; he has defeated an enemy; he has obtained, perhaps, a splendid establishment for himself and his family. But how is all this success enjoyed? with a mind often ill at ease; with a character dubious at the best, suspected by the world in general, seen through by the judicious and discerning. For the man of the world flatters himself in vain, if he imagines that, by the plausible appearances of his behaviour, he can thoroughly conceal from the world what he is, and keep them ignorant of the hollow principles upon which he has acted. For a short time the world may be deceived; but after a man has

continued for a while to act his part upon the public stage, and has been tried by the different occurrences of life, his real character never fails to be discovered. The judgment of the public on the character of men, as to their worth, probity, and honour, seldom errs. In the mean time, the advantages of fortune or station, which the man of the world has gained, after having been enjoyed for a while, become insipid to him; their first relish is gone, and he has little more to expect. He finds himself embarrassed with cares and fears. He is sensible that by many he is envied and hated; and though surrounded by low flatterers, is conscious that he is destitute of real friends. As he advances in years, all the enjoyments of his troubled prosperity are diminished more and more, and with many apprehensions he looks forward to the decline of life.

Compute now, O wise man, as thou art! what thou hast acquired by all thy selfish and intricate wisdom, by all thy refined and double conduct, thy dark and designing policy! Canst thou say that thy mind is satisfied with thy past tenour of conduct? Has thy real happiness kept pace, in any degree, with the success of thy worldly plans, or the advancement of thy fortune? Are thy days more cheerful and gay, or are thy nights more calm and free of care, than those of the plain and upright man, whom thou hast so often treated with scorn? To thine own conscience I appeal, whether thou darest say, that aught which thou hast gained by the wisdom of the world, be a sufficient compensation for incurring the displeasure of thy Creator, for forfeiting self-approbation within thy breast, for losing the esteem of the wisest

and worthiest part of mankind around thee?——*How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? How long will ye love vanity, and seek after lies?*

From what has been said of the nature and the effects of worldly wisdom, you will now judge how justly it is termed *foolishness with God*, and how much it merits the severe epithets which are given it in Scripture, of *earthly, sensual, and devilish.* Opposite to it stands the *wisdom that is from above*, which is described by an Apostle, as *pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.** — This, and this only, is that real wisdom, which it is both our duty and our interest to cultivate. It carries every character of being far superior to the wisdom of the world. It is masculine and generous; it is magnanimous and brave; it is uniform and consistent. The wise man of the world is obliged to shape and form his course according to the changing occurrences of the world; he is unsteady and perplexed; he trembles at every possible consequence, and is ever looking to futurity with a troubled mind. But the wise man in God's sight moves in a higher sphere. His integrity directs his course without perplexity or trouble. He inquires only what is right, becoming, and honourable for him to do. Being satisfied as to this, he asks no further questions. The issue it is not in his power to direct; but the part which is assigned to him, he will act; secure, that

* James, iii. 15. 17.

come what will, in life and death, the Providence of that God whom he serves, will effectually guard all his great interests. At the same time, the spirit of this wisdom is perfectly consistent with proper foresight, and vigilant attention. It is opposed to art and cunning, not to prudence and caution. It is the mark, not of a weak and improvident, but of a great and noble mind; which will in no event take refuge in falsehood and dissimulation, which scorns deceit, because it holds it to be mean and base; and seeks no disguise, because it needs none to hide it.—Such a character is both amiable and venerable. While it ennobles the magistrate and the judge, and adds honour and dignity to the most exalted stations, it commands respect in every rank of life. When the memory of artful and crooked policy speedily sinks, and is extinguished, this true wisdom shall long preserve an honourable memorial among men, and from God shall receive everlasting glory.

SERMON LXXXIX.

On the Government of Human Affairs by Providence.

PROVERBS, xvi. 9.

A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps.

MANY devices there are, and much exercise of thought and counsel ever going on among mankind. When we look abroad into the world, we behold a very busy and active scene; a great multitude always in motion, actuated by a variety of passions, and engaged in the prosecution of many different designs, where they commonly flatter themselves with the prospect of success. But much of this labour we behold, at the same time, falling to the ground. *The race is far from being always to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or riches to men of understanding.* It plainly appears, that the efforts of our activity, how great soever they may be, are subject to the control of a superior invisible Power; to that Providence of Heaven, which works by secret and imperceptible, but irresistible means. Higher counsels than ours, are concerned in the issues of human conduct. Deeper and more extensive plans, of which nothing is known to us, are carried on above. The line is let out, to allow us to run a certain length; but by that line we are all the while invisibly held, and are recalled and

checked at the pleasure of Heaven.—Such being now the condition of man on earth, let us consider what instruction this state of things is fitted to afford us. I shall first illustrate a little farther the position in the text, that though a *man's heart may devise his way, it is the Lord who directeth his steps;* and then point out the practical improvement to be made of this doctrine.

Among all who admit the existence of a Deity, it has been a general belief that he exercises some government over human affairs. It appeared altogether contrary to reason, to suppose that after God had erected this stupendous fabric of the universe, had beautified it with so much ornament, and peopled it with such a multitude of rational beings, he should then have thrown it out from his care, as a despised, neglected offspring, and allowed its affairs to float about at random. There was, indeed, one set of ancient philosophers who adopted this absurd opinion; but though they nominally allowed the existence of some beings whom they called gods, yet as they ascribed to them neither the creation nor the government of the world, they were held to be in reality Atheists.

In what manner Providence interposes in human affairs; by what means it influences the thoughts and counsels of men, and notwithstanding the influence it exerts, leaves to them the freedom of will and choice, are subjects of dark and mysterious nature, and which have given occasion to many an intricate controversy. Let us remember, that the manner in which God influences the motion of all the heavenly bodies, the nature of that secret power

by which he is ever directing the sun and the moon, the planets, stars, and comets, in their course through the Heavens, while they appear to move themselves in a free course, are matters no less inexplicable to us, than the manner in which he influences the counsels of men. But, though the mode of Divine operation remains unknown, the fact of an overruling influence is equally certain in the moral, as it is in the natural world. In cases where the fact is clearly authenticated, we are not at liberty to call its truth in question, merely because we understand not the manner in which it is brought about. Nothing can be more clear from the testimony of Scripture, than that God takes part in all that happens among mankind; directing and overruling the whole course of events so as to make every one of them answer the designs of his wise and righteous government. This is distinctly and explicitly asserted in the text. Throughout all the sacred writings, God is represented as on every occasion, by various dispensations of his Providence, rewarding the righteous, or chastening them, according as his wisdom requires, and punishing the wicked. We cannot, indeed, conceive God acting as the governor of the world at all, unless his government were to extend to all the events that happen. It is upon the supposition of a particular Providence, that our worship and prayers to him are founded. All his perfections would be utterly insignificant to us, if they were not exercised on every occasion, according as the circumstances of his creatures required. The Almighty would then be no more than an unconcerned spectator of the behaviour of

his subjects, regarding the obedient and the rebellious with an equal eye.

It were needless to prosecute any farther the argument in favour of a particular Providence. The experience of every one must, more or less, bear testimony to it. We need not for this purpose have recourse to those sudden and unexpected vicissitudes, which have sometimes astonished whole nations, and drawn their attention to the conspicuous hand of Heaven. We need not appeal to the history of the statesman and the warrior; of the ambitious and the enterprising. We confine our observation to those whose lives have been most plain and simple, and who had no desire to depart from the ordinary train of conduct.—In how many instances, my friends, have you found, that you are held in subjection to a higher Power, on whom depends the accomplishment of your wishes and designs? Fondly you had projected some favourite plan. You thought that you had forecast, and provided for all that might happen. You had taken your measures with such vigilant prudence, that on every side you seemed to yourself perfectly guarded and secure. But, lo! some little event hath come about, unforeseen by you, and in its consequences, at the first seemingly inconsiderable, which yet hath turned the whole course of things into a new direction, and blasted all your hopes. At other times, your counsels and plans have been permitted to succeed. You then applauded your own wisdom, and sat down to feast on the happiness you had attained. To your surprise you found, that happiness was not there; and that God's decree had appointed it to be only vanity. We labour for prosperity, and obtain it not.

Unexpected, it is sometimes made to drop upon us, as if of its own accord. The happiness of man depends on secret springs, too nice and delicate to be adjusted by human art. It requires a favourable combination of external circumstances with the state of his own mind. To accomplish on every occasion such a combination, is far beyond his power; but it is what God can at all times effect; as the whole series of external causes are arranged according to his pleasure, and the hearts of all men are in his hands, *to turn them wheresoever he wills, as rivers of water.* From the imperfection of our knowledge to ascertain what is good for us, and from the defect of our power to bring about that good when known, arise all those disappointments which continually testify, that *the way of man is not in himself;* that he is not the master of his own lot; that though he may *devise*, it is God who *directs;* God who can make the smallest incident an effectual instrument of his Providence for overturning the most laboured plans of men.

Accident, and chance, and fortune, are words which we often hear mentioned, and much is ascribed to them in the life of man. But they are words without meaning; or, as far as they have any signification, they are no other than names for the unknown operations of Providence. For it is certain, that in God's universe nothing comes to pass causelessly or in vain. Every event has its own determined direction. That chaos of human affairs and intrigues, where we can see no light; that mass of disorder and confusion which they often present to our view, is all clearness and order in the sight of Him who is governing and directing all, and bringing forward

every event in its due time and place. *The Lord sitteth on the flood. The Lord maketh the wrath of man to praise him,* as he maketh *the hail and the rain obey his word. He hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.*

HAVING illustrated the doctrine of the text, I proceed to show how it is to be improved by us. I must begin with warning you, that the doctrine I have illustrated has no tendency to supersede counsel, design, or a proper exertion of the active powers of man. Because Providence is superior to us, it does not follow that therefore man has no part to act; or because our industry is sometimes disappointed, that therefore it is always vain. It is by the use of ordinary means that Providence, for the most part, accomplishes its designs. Man *devising his own way,* and carrying on his own plans, has a place in the order of means which Providence employs. To exertions, therefore, of his own, he is called by God. His Maker framed him for action; and then only he is happy, when in action he is properly employed. To supine idleness, to a vain and presumptuous trust in Providence, while we neglect what is incumbent on us to perform, no encouragement is given in Scripture; on the contrary, threatenings are denounced against it. But the doctrine of the text is to be improved,

IN the first place, for correcting anxious and immoderate care about the future events of our life. This anxiety is the source of much sin, and therefore is often rebuked in Scripture, as alienating the mind

from God, and from the higher objects of virtue and religion, and filling the heart with passions which both annoy and corrupt it. If it be the parent of much sin, it is certainly also the offspring of great folly. For in such a state as human life has just now been represented to be, what means this mighty bustle and stir, this restless perturbation of thought and care, as if all the issues of futurity rested wholly on our conduct? — Something depends upon thyself; and there is reason, upon this account, for acting thy part with prudence and attention. But upon a hand unseen it depends, either to overturn all thy projects, or to crown them with success; and therefore, when the issue is so uncertain, thine attention should never run into immoderate care. By disquieting thyself so much about futurity, thou takest upon thy shoulders a load which is not thine, and which indeed thou art unable to bear.

The folly of such anxiety is aggravated by this consideration, that all events are under a much better and wiser direction than we could place them. Perhaps that evil which we have dreaded so much in prospect, may never be suffered to arrive. Providence may either have turned into a quite different course, that black cloud which appeared to carry the storm; or before the storm burst, our heads may be laid so low as to be out of its reach. Perhaps, also, the storm may be permitted to come upon us, and yet under its dark wings may bring to us some secret and unexpected good. *Who knoweth what is good for man all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?* Who knoweth this, my brethren, except God? And who consulteth it so effectually as he, who, by his infinite wisdom,

maketh all things work together for good to them who love him? Is it not, then, our greatest happiness, that when *man deviseth, God directeth?* Is it not far better for us than if the case were reversed; if the all-wise God were only ineffectually to devise, and man, blind, and ignorant, and rash as he is, were to have the full direction of his own steps?—Wherefore vex not thyself in vain. To the unavoidable evils of life, add not this evil of thine own procuring, a tormenting anxiety about the success of thy designs. The great rule both of religion and wisdom is, Do thy duty, and leave the issue to Heaven. *Commit thy way unto the Lord.* Act thy part fairly and as wisely as thou canst, for thine apparent interest; and then, with a steady and untroubled mind, wait for what God shall see meet to appoint. This is wisdom; all beyond this is vanity and folly.

In the second place, the doctrine of the text is calculated not only to repress anxiety, but to enforce moderation of mind in every state; it humbles the pride of prosperity, and prevents that despair which is incident to adversity.—The presumption of prosperity is the source both of vices and mischiefs innumerable. It renders men forgetful of God and religion. It intoxicates them with the love, and immerses them in the indulgence of pleasure. It hardens their hearts to the distresses of their brethren. Now, consider, how little ground the real situation of the most prosperous man affords for this vain elation of mind. He is dependent every moment on the pleasure of a superior; and knows not but Providence may be just preparing for him

the most unforeseen reverses. Shall he *boast himself of to-morrow, who knoweth not what a day may bring forth?* He hath perhaps said in his heart, *my mountain stands strong; I shall never be moved.* But God needeth only to *hide his face,* and presently *he is troubled.* That little eminence on which he stood, and from which he surveyed with pride his fellow-creatures below him, was no more than an eminence of dust. The Almighty blows upon it with the breath of his mouth, and it is scattered. Belongs it to him whose tenure of prosperity is so insecure, to utter the voice of contempt, or to lift the rod of oppression over his fellows, when over his own head is stretched that high arm of Heaven, which levels, at one touch, the mighty with the low?

The government of God is accompanied with this signal advantage, that at once it humbles the proud, and revives the distressed. As long as we believe in one higher than the highest, to whom all must look up, the greatest man is taught to be modest, and to feel his dependence; and the lowest man has an object of continual resource and hope. Injured by men, he can fly to that righteous Governor who rules the earth, and from his interposition hope for better days. Providence is the great sanctuary to the afflicted who maintain their integrity. Consolation they always find in the belief of it; and often there has issued from this sanctuary the most seasonable relief. There issues from it, at all times, this voice of comfort; *trust in the Lord, and do good; and so thou shalt dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.** Thine enemies may conspire;

* Psalm xxxvii. 3.

the Heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. But he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh the Lord shall hold them in derision. For the Lord is *the keeper of Israel;* he is the *shield of the righteous. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth and for ever.* *

In the third place, the doctrine that has been illustrated, of the interposal of Providence in all human affairs, places the vanity and folly of all sinful plans in a very strong light. — All sin, in every view of it, must be attended with danger. He who embarks in any unjust or criminal enterprise, besides the manifest peril to his own soul, incurs the risk of his character being discovered, and of meeting with hatred, contempt, and just resentment from the world. One would think that when the consequences on one side are so dangerous, the bribe on the other side must be very high, and the prospect of success very fair and promising. Now consider how this matter truly stands. The sinner hath against him, first, that general uncertainty which I before showed to take place in all the designs and projects formed by men. Could the most artful and best devised means always ensure success to the end we sought to obtain, some apology might then be made for departing occasionally from the path of rectitude. But it is far from being true, that such road to sure success can, on any occasion, be found. On the contrary, we every day see the most plausible and best concerted plans baffled and thrown to the ground; and

* Psalm cxxv. 2.

there is nothing which on many occasions has been more remarked, than Providence seeming to make sport of the wisdom of man.

This view of things alone were sufficient to show to the sinner the insecurity and danger of the system on which he acts. But there is much more against him than this. For he, by his guilty plans, hath engaged against himself one certain and most formidable enemy, to whom he hath great reason to look up with terror. He cannot possibly believe that the righteous Governor of the universe beholds with an equal eye the designs of the virtuous who honour him, and the designs of the guilty who despise his laws, and do injustice to his servants. No; against these latter, Providence hath pointed its darts, hath bent its bow in the heavens; *the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.** Other designs may fail; but those of the wicked, God is concerned in overthrowing. It is true, that this life is not the season of rendering to every man according to his works. But though retribution does not on every occasion take place at present, yet neither is the exercise of Divine justice always delayed. The history of the world is continually furnishing us with examples of the wicked *taken in their own devices*; of the crafty *snared in the works of their own hands*; of sinners *falling into the pit which themselves had digged.* How often, when signal crimes were ready to be perpetrated, hath God remarkably interposed; hath spread his shield before the just, unnerved the arm of the assassin, or struck a sudden damp into his mind at the critical moment! —Obnoxious then as the sinner is to so many

* Psalm xxxiv. 16.

dangers: exposed perpetually to the disappointment of his designs by the uncertainty of human events; exposed, over and above, to the avenging interposition of heaven; what strange infatuation has tempted him to depart from the plain and safe path of integrity?

In the last place, from all that has been said on this subject, we clearly see how much it concerns us to perform those duties which a proper regard to Providence requires, and to obtain protection from that Power which directeth and disposeth all. A more incontrovertible axiom there cannot be than this, that if man only deviseth his way, while God overrules his devices and directs his steps, an interest in God's favour is far more important than all the wisdom and ability of man. Without his favour, the wisest will be disappointed and baffled; under his protection and guidance, the simple are led in a plain and sure path.—In vain would the giddy and profane throw Providence out of their thoughts, and affect to think and act as if all depended on themselves. This boldness of self-sufficiency is affectation, and no more. For moments there are, when the man of stoutest heart feels the strong subjection under which he is held, and would gladly grasp at the aid of Heaven. As long as human affairs proceed in a smooth train, without any alarming presages of change or danger, the man of the world may remain pleased with himself, and be fully confident in his own powers. But whose life continues long so undisturbed? Let any uncommon violence shake the elements around him, and threaten him with destruction; let the aspect of public affairs

be so lowering as to forebode some great calamity; or in his private concerns let some sudden change arrive to shatter his fortune, or let sickness, and the harbingers of approaching death, show him his frailty; and how ready will he then be to send up prayers from the heart, that Providence would befriend and relieve him? Religion, my friends, is not a matter of theory and doubt. Its foundations are laid deep in the nature and condition of man. It lays hold of every man's feelings. In every man's heart and conscience it has many witnesses to its importance and reality.

Let us then neglect no means which may be of avail for procuring the grace and favour of that Divine Providence on which so much depends. Let no duties be overlooked which belong to us as subjects of God: devout worship, and grateful praises for all his blessings, humble trust in his goodness, and implicit submission to his will; and constant and cheerful obedience to his laws. Let us be thankful that God hath clearly made known all that he requires of us in order to be accepted in his sight; and that not only he has revealed the rule of duty, but also hath pointed out to us in the gospel, the direct method of reconciliation with him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Providence hath condescended to become our instructor in this great article; hath taught us in what way our sins may be forgiven, our imperfect services be accepted, and an interest in the Divine grace be attained by means of our Redeemer. Inexcusable we must be, if all this offered grace we shall wantonly throw at our feet. In a world so full of vicissitudes and uncertainty, let us take pains to secure to ourselves one resting place; one

habitation that cannot be moved. By piety and prayer, by faith, repentance, and a good life, let us seek the friendship of the Most High; so shall he who *directeth the steps of man* now, conduct our path in such a course as shall bring us in the end to himself.

SERMON XC.

On Prayer.

Psalm lxv. 2.

O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come!

THE Supreme Being is represented under many amiable characters in the sacred writings; as the *Father of mercies*, the *God of love*, the *Author of every good and perfect gift*. But there is no character which carries more comfort, or which renders God so properly the object of confidence and trust, as this, of his being the *Hearer of Prayer*. This view of the Almighty accommodates his perfections to our necessities and wants, and in our present frail and distressed state affords a constant refuge to which we can fly. *Unto Thee shall all flesh come.* To thee, shall an indigent world look up for the supply of their wants; to Thee, shall the proudest sinner, at some time or other, be compelled to bow; to Thee, shall the distressed and afflicted have recourse, as to their last relief and hope.

Prayer is a duty essential to natural religion. Wherever the light of nature taught men to acknowledge the being of a God, to that God also it directed them to pray. In the Christian revelation great stress is laid upon this duty, and great encouragement given to it. Our blessed Saviour not only set the

example himself, and enjoined the practice to his followers, but thought it worthy his express instruction to teach them in what manner to pray, and even to put words in their mouth. We are assured that prayers are not in vain; but that as *the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, so his ears are open to their cry;* that if we ask aright, *we shall receive; if we seek, we shall find; if we knock, it shall be opened to us.* It is, indeed, hard to say, whether prayer is to be most properly considered as a duty incumbent on all, or as a privilege allowed to them. But a blessed circumstance it is, that our duty and our privilege thus concur in one; that we are commanded to do what our wants naturally dictate to be done; even to ask what is good from God, who *giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.* — In treating of this subject, it will be proper to consider first, the nature and the subjects of prayer; next, its proper qualifications; and lastly, the advantages and blessings which attend it.

I. The Nature of Prayer supposes, in the first place, that we have a just sense of our own wants and miseries, and of our dependence on God for relief. To be suitably impressed with this sense, we need only think what our present situation is. We live in a world, where every thing around us is dark and uncertain. When we look back on the past, we must remember that there we have met with much disappointment and vanity. When we look forward to the future, all is unknown. We are liable there to many dangers which we cannot foresee; and to many which we foresee approaching, yet know not how to defend ourselves against them. We are often

ignorant what course we can steer with safety; nay, so imperfect is our own wisdom, and so great the darkness which covers futurity, that while we imagine that we are in the road to prosperity, we are often rushing blindly into the most fatal evils. —— Besides these contingencies of life, which make us feel so deeply the necessity of looking up to some more powerful Guide and Protector, there are other circumstances in our state which lead to reflections still more alarming. We know that we are the subjects of a supreme righteous Governor, to whom we are accountable for our conduct. We were sent into this world by his appointment, and we are removed from it at his decree. How soon the call for our removal may be given, none of us know; but this we profess to believe, that upon our going hence we are to be brought into new and unknown habitations, suitable to our behaviour here. Who amongst us can say that he is perfectly ready to appear before his Creator and Judge, and to give an account to him for all the actions of his life? How much do the best of us stand in need of mercy and forgiveness for our offences past, and of direction and assistance from Heaven to guide us in our future way! What reason to dread that if we be left entirely to ourselves we will be in the utmost danger of departing from virtue and from happiness, and of leaving life under the displeasure of Him who is to judge us! — While with this sense of our imperfections, our dangers, and our guilt, we come to the Hearer of Prayer, we must in the next place,

Pray to God, in the belief that with him there is power which can give us relief, and goodness which will incline him to give it. Prayer supposes a full

persuasion that his Providence rules and governs all; that through all futurity his eye penetrates; that there are no events of our life in which he interposes not; that he knows the most secret motions of our hearts; and that to the hearts of all men he has access, by avenues unknown to us, and can turn them according to his pleasure. It supposes at the same time, a firm confidence in the declarations he has made in his word, that a plan is established for dispensing grace to fallen and guilty mankind, through a great Redeemer. It supposes a humble hope that as he *knows our frame and remembers we are dust*, he will not reject the supplications of the penitent returning sinner; that he is one who hath no pleasure in our sorrows and distress, but desires the happiness of his creatures, and beholds with complacency the humble and sincere worshipper.

Now these things being supposed, this just sense of our own imperfections and guilt, and this proper impression of the Divine nature, when the soul is in this posture of devotion, breathing forth its sorrows and its wants before its Creator, and imploring from him protection and aid, it cannot but give vent to the high conceptions with which it will then be affected of God's supreme perfection. This of course becomes the foundation of that part of devotion which is styled adoration or praise. — As it is the experience of past goodness which warms the heart of the worshipper, and encourages his present supplication, he will naturally be led to a grateful celebration of the mercies of Heaven; whence thanksgiving becomes an essential part of his devotion. — As he cannot put up petitions without acknowledging his wants, and as his wants are closely connected with

his frailty and ill-deserving, hence the most humble confession of guilt must necessarily enter into Prayer. — If there be any terms on which we may expect the Deity to be most propitious; if there be any meritorious Intercessor through whom we may prefer our request to him, this assuredly will be the method which the pious worshipper will choose for addressing the Almighty; and this will be the ground of his praying in the name of Christ, sending up his petitions to God through his beloved Son, whom he heareth always.

Thus it appears that there is a just foundation for Prayer, in all its parts, naturally laid in the present circumstances of man, and in the relation in which he stands to God. But as petition is the chief and most distinguishing part of prayer, it will be requisite that we consider particularly what those requests are, which are proper to be offered up to God. These may all be classed under three heads: first, requests for temporal blessings; next, for spiritual mercies; and lastly, intercessions for the welfare of others.

WITH regard to temporal blessings, though men may lay a restraint upon themselves in the expressions which they utter in Prayer, yet it is much to be suspected, that the inward wishes of their hearts for such blessings are often the most fervent of any. To wish and pray for the advantages of life is not forbidden. Our Saviour hath so far countenanced it, as to command us to pray that God would *give us our daily bread;* that is, as his words have been always understood, that he would bestow what is necessary for the sustenance and comfort of life. Yet the very sound of the words retrenches every superfluous and extra-

vagant wish. Not for riches and honours, for great advancement or long life, or for numerous and flourishing families, has he given us any encouragement to pray. Foreign are such things to the real improvement, foreign very often to the true happiness of man. Foolishly they may be wished for, when the wish accomplished would prove our ruin. Let health and peace, contentment and tranquillity, bound the humble prayer which we send up to Heaven; that God may *feed us with food convenient for us*; that whatever our outward circumstances are, they may be blessed to us by him, and accompanied with a quiet mind. Even health and peace themselves may not always prove blessings. Sweet and desirable as they seem, God may, at certain times, foresee their tendency to corrupt our hearts, and may in mercy reject a prayer for them, which, on our part, may be allowably put up. For the nature of all temporal things is such, that they have not one fixed and stable character, but may be convertible on different occasions either into good or ill; and therefore, some reserve in our wish must always be maintained; and to the wiser judgment of God, it must be left to determine what is fit to be bestowed, and what to be withheld. —— But this we may lawfully pray, that, as far as to God seems meet, he would make our state comfortable, and our days easy and tranquil; that he would save us from falling into any severe and extreme distress; that he would preserve to us the enjoyment of those friends and comforts that we most love; or if he bereave us of any of them, that he would in mercy assist and support us under the loss; in fine, that he would so order our lot that we may be kept as free from pain, trouble,

and anguish, as shall be consistent with the higher improvements of our souls in piety, virtue, and wisdom.

In the next place, with regard to spiritual mercies, we are unquestionably allowed to be more fervent and explicit in our requests at the throne of grace. God can never be displeased in hearing us implore from him those graces and endowments of the soul, that beautify us in his sight, that are good for all men, good at all times, indeed the only certain and immutable goods; and therefore to these only pertains that earnestness, that urgency of Prayer, which is represented as acceptable to the Almighty. —— Our petitions of this nature, our Saviour has ranked under the two great heads of forgiveness for past offences, and deliverance from future temptations. It is chiefly for these important blessings, that we are to prostrate ourselves before our Father in Heaven, begging of him, who knows our heart with all its frailties, that he would accept our sincere repentance, and pardon our errors for the sake of Jesus Christ. We must earnestly pray, that he would strengthen us by his grace to resist the temptations that hereafter may assault us; and whatever he appoint to befal us without, may enable us to preserve a good conscience within; that he may teach us to know ourselves, and assist us to controul and govern our passions; that he may endow us with temperance in prosperity, and resignation under adversity: that in no situation of life we may be allowed to forget what we owe to our Maker and Redeemer; and that after having discharged the duties of life, through the assistance of Divine grace, with some measure of

integrity and honour, we may be prepared for going through the last scene of life without dismay; and when we have made a decent and peaceful retreat from this world, we may then find ourselves in some better and happier state.

In the first place, it is to be remembered that intercessions for the welfare of others form a material part of Prayer. The sincere worshipper is not to consider himself as a single and separate being, confining his concern wholly to himself. Our Saviour has initiated us into a more noble and enlarged spirit of devotion, when he taught us to begin with praying that the kingdom of God may be advanced over all, and that mankind may be rendered as happy by doing his will, as the angels are in heaven. When we bow our knee to the common Father, let it be like affectionate members of his family, desiring the prosperity of all our brethren. In particular, the happiness of our friends and relations, of those whom we love, and by whom we are loved, ought then to be near our heart; praying that the Almighty may be our God, and the God of our friends and family, for ever; that he may watch over them, and bless them; and may make us long happy in mutual comfort and affection. We ought to remember our benefactors before God, and pray for a return of Divine blessings on their head. The distressed and afflicted ought to share our sympathy; remembering them *who suffer adversity, as being ourselves in the body;* and shedding the friendly tear at the thought of human woe. Our enemies themselves ought not to be forgotten in our prayers: in fine, our prayers ought to be an exercise of extensive benevolence of heart; a solemn tes-

timony offered up to the God of Love, of our kind and charitable affection to all men.

But now, after what has been suggested concerning the proper subjects of Prayer, I am aware that it may be said by some, To what purpose is all this detail? —— Do we propose, by our prayers, to give to the Supreme Being any new information, regarding our situation, of which he is not possessed. Does he not already know all our wants and distresses; and will He not be prompted by his goodness and wisdom to do for us in such circumstances, whatever is fit and proper to be done? Do we imagine that by the importunity of our solicitations and requests, He can be prevailed upon to alter his purpose, or depart from his system in the government of the world, in order to gratify our desires? —— Such objections against the reasonableness of prayer, have been often urged with all the parade of scepticism. Though, on the first view, they may carry some appearance of speciousness, yet on a slight discussion they fall to the ground; for they all rest on a mistaken idea of the nature and design of prayer. No man in his sober senses could ever believe that, by lifting his feeble voice to Heaven, he could convey to the ear of the Almighty any new knowledge or information. None but the most ignorant could imagine, that by his prayers, he could raise any new emotions in the unchangeable Sovereign of the universe, and prevail upon him to alter his decrees in consequence of his request. —— The efficacy of Prayer lies, not in working a change upon God, but in working a change upon ourselves; in begetting or improving right dispositions of heart, and thereby making us fit subjects

of the Divine mercy. It is not for the sake of our asking, that God grants the requests we prefer in prayer; but as our asking, with proper dispositions, produces that frame of mind which qualifies us to receive.—— Hence Prayer has been appointed by God as an instrument for improving our nature, and is required on our part as a condition of receiving his favours. Thus, when upon a certain occasion he had by his Prophet predicted and promised circumstances of prosperity to the Jewish nation, the Prophet was directed to add, *Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.* *—— Is there any one who would say, that it is not incumbent on all rational creatures to feel their dependence on the God who has formed them, and to refer to him all the blessings which they either enjoy or hope to receive? Would not the want of such becoming sentiments be altogether unworthy and sinful? And if they are such sentiments as ought to be entertained, must it not be proper to express them by words in prayer, and thereby to strengthen the impression of them on our minds?

But in truth there is no occasion for entering into any long discussion of argument in order to evince the reasonableness of prayer. It is the natural dictate of the human heart. Though in the days of prosperity and ease it may, like other duties, have been neglected and forgotten, yet on all great and trying occasions, men are prompted by an irresistible impulse to lift their eyes, and address their voice to Heaven. Who is there, for instance, that feeling himself cruelly oppressed by injustice and violence,

* Ezekiel, xxxvi. 37.

without any prospect of procuring redress, can forbear appealing to a Power that rules above, and invoking Divine interposition to vindicate his innocence, and avenge his wrongs? Who that is standing by the death-bed of a beloved friend, of a spouse, a brother, or a son, and sees them struggling with the last agonies, but finds himself impelled to look up to Heaven, and to pray from the heart that where men can give no aid, God would in his mercy support the dying man? Was there ever a sinner so hardened, that when he finds himself leaving the world, and standing on the brink of an unknown eternity, is not disposed with earnest and trembling voice to pray that God would forgive his errors, and receive in peace his departing spirit? In such situations as these, man feels what he truly is, and speaks the native unadulterated language of the heart.——Accordingly, throughout all ages and nations, the obligation to Prayer as a duty has been recognised, and its propriety has been felt. Over all the world, even among the most savage tribes, temples have been built, worshippers have assembled in crowds; and the wildest superstition has, by the various forms of homage which it adopted, borne testimony to this truth, that there is some God, to whom, as *the Hearer of Prayer, all flesh should come.*

In order that prayer may produce its proper effect, there are certain qualifications necessarily belonging to it, which come next to be considered.

One of the first and chief of these is seriousness, or an attentive and solemn frame of mind, in opposition to thoughts that wander, and to words that drop forth unmeaning from the lips. One would think it unnecessary to mention such a qualification to be

requisite, when we are to be employed in so solemn an act as an immediate address to our Maker. Yet there is ground to apprehend, that an admonition of this nature is necessary to be given to many professed Christians. Men from their childhood have been so oft accustomed to repeat certain expressions, which they call, saying prayers, with little understanding, and less attention to what they say, that the habit of it is apt to be continued throughout life; as if the mere uttering of words, or presenting themselves, at set times, in a certain posture before God, had some charms in it to attract the blessings of Heaven.——My brethren, this is trifling with one of the most important exercises in which the human mind can be employed; it is turning devotion into childish folly. Let us never forget that it is the heart which must pray. The heart may pray when no words are uttered. But if the heart be not engaged in Prayer, all the words we can utter are no better than rude offensive sounds in the ear of the Almighty.—Collect then thy mind within itself, before thou preferrest a single petition; nay, before thou pronouncest the name of God in prayer. Be alone with him and thine own soul; under the same impression as if thou wert just about to appear before the judgment-seat of that God to whom thou prayest.

To seriousness, we must join affection in prayer; I mean that devotion of the heart which is inspired by gratitude and love, in distinction from forced prayer, or what is unwillingly preferred from servile fear, or mere regard to decency. We must come into the presence of God, as to a Father in Heaven; not to a hard and oppressive master, to whom we are obliged to pay obeisance to prevent him from destroying

us.——Profound humility is perfectly consistent with this affectionate spirit in prayer. No presumptuous familiarity must enter into our addresses to God. We are enjoined to serve him *with reverence and godly fear*. Our devotion will be most fervent and affectionate, when we entertain the humblest thoughts of ourselves, joined with the most exalted conceptions of that God to whom we pray. *Remember that God is in heaven, and thou art on earth; therefore let thy words be few.* *

Faith is a qualification of Prayer expressly required in Scripture. He that prayeth, saith the Apostle James, *let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.* †— By faith in Prayer, two things are meant: first, a general persuasion that God is a Being of infinite goodness and mercy; to whom, therefore, the prayers of his creatures are not put up in vain. *He that cometh unto God must believe*, not only that *he is*, but that *he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him* ‡: without some belief of this kind, prayers were altogether superfluous. For who would send up supplications to a God who was believed to be inaccessible to his creatures, and to have no regard to their circumstances and wants?— At the same time, much ground we have to be conscious of our own unworthiness, and to tremble at the remembrance of it, when we address ourselves to Heaven; and therefore, secondly, to pray in faith is, in the Scripture sense of it, to pray in the name of Christ; that is, in the faith that it is through his merits and mediation only we can find acceptance with God. We acknowledge our guilt; we disclaim all trust in

* Eccles. v. 2. † James, i. 6. ‡ Heb. xi. 6.

our own righteousness; and implore grace from God on account of what his Son has done and suffered for us. This is the clear and express doctrine of the New Testament. *We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. We have this new and living way which he hath consecrated for us within the veil. Having this High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.**

Having thus pointed out the chief and most essential qualifications of Prayer, it remains that I lay some considerations before you, to show the importance and advantages of it.

In the first place, Prayer is one of the most powerful means of recalling our minds from the vanities of life to serious thoughts; to a proper sense of God, and our duty; and to all the high objects with which we are intimately connected as rational and immortal beings. Surrounded, as we are, with the objects and pleasures of the world; busied with its avocations, and continually immersed in its pursuits, man would become altogether the victim of sense, and a prey to its temptations; if there were not some stated occasions which brought him home to himself, and to the thoughts of another world. Prayer has a much more impressive effect for this purpose, than can be expected from simple meditation. An immediate and solemn address to an omniscient Being, in whose presence we consider ourselves as then particularly sisted, tends to produce

* Heb. x. 19—22.

a higher degree of serious and awful recollection, than would arise from a mere soliloquy of the mind with itself. In Prayer, the soul approaches to the borders of an invisible world, and acts as a spirit holding intercourse with the Father of spirits. It drops for a time the remembrance of its earthly connections, to dwell among everlasting objects. Prayer, by this means, both composes and purifies the heart; it gives the soul its proper elevation towards God, and has a happy effect to counterwork the dangerous impressions made by the corruptions of the world around us.

In the next place, Prayer is useful, not only as a corrective of our natural levity and forgetfulness of God, but as an actual exercise of the best affections of our nature, which are thereby confirmed and strengthened. As far as Prayer is not a mere emission of empty words, but speaks, as it ought to do, the language of the heart, it is an assemblage of all the affections which constitute piety. It implies the highest sentiments of reverence and adoration, of love and gratitude to God, of trust in his mercy, and of faith in our blessed Redeemer, all animating the heart. Whatever nourishes such affections as these in the soul, gives strength and support at the same time to active virtue; and thereby prepares and assists us for every duty of life. — With respect to ourselves, the view which Prayer gives, of our necessities and wants, of our sins and offences against God, and of the dangers which we have thereby incurred, produces becoming humility of mind. Prostrate before that great Being whom we have so much offended, all the pride of man is laid in the dust. He

is impressed with a sense of what he truly is, and taught how far removed from what he ought to be. By the prayers he puts up for being assisted to repent of past follies, and to make improvements for the future in virtue, the desire of virtue is cherished, and the pursuit of it excited; and if this desire after virtue which is expressed in Prayer be genuine, it is a degree of goodness already in some measure begun within the heart. — Prayer is, at the same time, an exercise of benevolence towards men, as well as of piety towards God; when, as was before observed, not merely as individuals, but as members of the great family of God, we come before our heavenly Father, and express our affectionate wishes for all our brethren. —— While Prayer in this manner gives exertion to many of the highest parts of goodness, it is attended moreover with this great advantage, that it tends to fortify the worshipper in the practice of all his duties. For it impresses him with a sense of God as the great friend and protector of righteousness in the world; to whom, therefore, all righteous men may look up with confidence and hope; whose strength is more than sufficient for their weakness; whose gracious aid none that served him ever implored in vain.

In the last place, Prayer is important, not only as a means of high improvement in religion, but as an instrument of consolation and relief under the distresses of life. How many situations are found in the world, where men have no resource left to them but prayer to God! How forlorn would the persecuted and afflicted, the sad and the sorrowful be, if even this last sanctuary were shut against them; if

they had no Protector in Heaven to whom they could look up in the hours of anguish! — We all know what a relief it is to be able to unbosom our griefs to some friend whom we believe compassionate and kind, even though it be not in his power to give us any effectual aid. In our heavenly Father, we can look up, not only to one in whom *compassions flow*, who *knows our frame, remembers we are dust, and pities us as a father pitieth his children*; but to One whose arm is all-powerful, either to support us under our distress, or, if to his wisdom it seem meet, to relieve us altogether from it. —— Hence, Prayer is so often the last retreat of the miserable. Where men can give them no aid, *God is their present help*. To him they can pour forth those secret griefs, which to men they sometimes cannot disclose. He hears those groans of the labouring heart, which no words can utter, and circumstances which would expose our requests to be despised by the world, prevent not our prayers from finding acceptance with God. It is his character to *hear the cry of the poor, and to regard the prayer of the destitute*: He is the *helper of them who have no help of man*. —— Hence, Prayer may be termed the Temple of Tranquillity to the unhappy; where their minds are soothed, and their cares and sorrows are for a time hushed and forgotten. It may justly be said, that there only, on this side of the grave, *the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. There, the prisoners rest together; they hear no more the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master*.*

* Job, iii. 17—19.

THE reasonableness of Prayer, as a duty, and the advantages attending it, being such as I have now endeavoured briefly to set forth, there is no wonder that so many repeated recommendations of it occur in the Sacred Writings; and that we are enjoined to be *fervent in prayer*, to be *instant in prayer*, nay, to *pray without ceasing*.* — By such precepts I do not understand that we are bound to frequent repetitions of long and tedious prayers. Our Saviour, in his excellent discourse on this subject †, has sufficiently cautioned us against the hypocrisy of those who *use vain repetitions, and think that they shall be heard for their much speaking*. But besides the stated times of both public and private prayer which we ought devoutly to observe, there is a habit of devotion, in occasional elevations of the soul towards God, which highly deserves to be cultivated. A thousand occurrences which happen when we are engaged in the affairs of the world, and a thousand objects which present themselves to our view in the earth and the heavens when we are solitary and alone, may suggest matter of devout ejaculation towards God. By cherishing such a habit, we preserve on our minds the native spirit of Prayer. We correct those evil dispositions which intercourse with the world is always apt to introduce; we improve our contemplation of the objects which surround us, into an act of devotion; and either from the crowded city, or the solitary field, can send up to Heaven that homage of the heart, which is no less acceptable to the Almighty, than if it arose in vocal form from the midst of the temple. In this sense I understand the

* 1 Thess. v. 17. † Matt. vi.

injunction given to *pray without ceasing*.— And surely, my brethren, when we consider the high value of those blessings for which we depend on Heaven, it must appear to every reflecting mind, that we cannot be too earnest in our supplications to obtain them. To what purpose tend all our present solicitude and care; all the application of the thoughtful, and all the industry of the active and diligent? Is it not in order to pass through life contented, easy, and happy? But can you pass through life with contentment and happiness, unless you enjoy peace within, a good conscience, and a comfortable hope of a future existence? Are not all these things directly and immediately the gifts of God, imparted by him to the souls of men? And can you expect to receive such gifts, unless you confess your dependence on Him who bestows them, and implore them from that gracious God, who *giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not?*

SERMON XCI.

On the Last Judgment.

2 Corinthians, v. 10.

For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

THESE words present to our view the great event which is to determine the fate of all mankind. No article of christian faith is more clearly ascertained in Scripture, is of greater importance in itself, and more worthy to dwell upon our minds than this, of the final judgment of God. It adds solemnity to every part of religion: it introduces an awful seriousness into our thoughts, by placing in the most striking light, the close connection between our present behaviour and our everlasting happiness or misery. In the Gospel it is described with so many circumstances of awe and terror, as may, to many, render the consideration of this subject dark and disagreeable. But we must remember, that though religion be often employed to sooth and comfort the distressed, and though this be one of its most salutary effects, yet this is not the only purpose to which it is to be applied by Ministers of the Gospel. In the midst of that levity and dissipation with which the world abounds, it is necessary to awaken the giddy

and unthinking, by setting before them in full view, all the dangers they incur by their conduct.—*Knowing the terror of the Lord*, adds the Apostle in the verse immediately following the text, *we persuade men.*——In treating of this subject, I shall, in the first place, state the arguments which reason affords for the belief of a judgment to come; and shall next show the improvements which we ought to make of the particular discoveries the Gospel hath made to us concerning it.

I. By taking a view of the arguments which reason affords for the belief of a general judgment, our faith in the discoveries of the Gospel will receive confirmation, from discerning their consonance with the natural sentiments of the human heart.

In the first place, and as the foundation of all, I begin with observing, that there is in the nature of things a real and eternal difference between right and wrong, between a virtuous and an immoral conduct; a difference which all men discern of themselves, and which leads them unavoidably to think of some actions as deserving blame and punishment, and of others, as worthy of praise and reward. If all actions were conceived as indifferent in their nature, no idea of justice and retribution would be found among men; they would not consider themselves as in any view accountable for their actions to any superior. But this is far from being the case. Every man feels himself under a law; the law of his being, which he cannot violate without being self-condemned. The most ignorant heathen knows and feels, that when he has committed an unjust or cruel

action, he has committed a crime, and deserves punishment. Never was there a nation on the face of the earth, among whom there did not prevail a consciousness that, by inhumanity and fraud, they justly exposed themselves to the hatred of those around them, and to the displeasure of any secret invisible power that ruled the world. This, therefore, may be assumed as an incontrovertible principle, that the difference of good and evil in actions, is not founded on arbitrary opinions or institutions, but in the nature of things, and the nature of man; and accords with the universal sense of the human kind. This being the case, it is certainly reasonable,

In the second place, to think that the Ruler of the world will make some distinction among his creatures according to their actions; and if this distinction be not made, or only imperfectly made in this life, there will be some future state of existence in which he will openly reward and punish. To suppose God to be a mere indifferent spectator of the conduct of his creatures, regarding with an equal eye the evil and the good, is in effect to annihilate his existence; as it contradicts every notion which mankind have entertained of a Supreme Being as just and good. It would represent him as inferior in character to many of his creatures on earth; as there is no man of tolerable virtue and humanity who is not shocked at the commission of atrocious crimes, and who does not desire to see the guilty punished, the innocent protected, and the virtuous rewarded. —— If there exist at all a God who governs the world, (and what nation has not acknowledged him

to exist?) as a governor he undoubtedly will act; and as such, will, somewhere, and at some period or other, reward and punish, according as his creatures obey, or violate, that law which he originally implanted in their hearts. —— Whether this be completely done in the present world, is not a point that requires long discussion. The experience of all ages has shown, that pain and pleasure, prosperity and adversity, are not at present distributed by Providence exactly according to the measure of men's probity and worth, but are apparently scattered with a promiscuous hand. Hence the ancient complaint, that *all things come alike to all men; that there is one event to the righteous and the wicked; that* to poverty and disappointment the righteous are often left, while *the tabernacles of robbers prosper.* —— An inference from hence might at first view arise, not favourable to the doctrines we now support; but we have to observe,

In the third place, that although full retribution be not as yet made to the good and to the evil, yet plain marks appear of a government already begun and carried on by God in the universe, though not fully completed; marks of his favouring and taking part with virtue, and of his providing punishments for vice. This observation deserves to be particularly attended to; as it is one of the chief arguments for a future Judgment. —— In the present system of things, had the righteous been uniformly happy, and the wicked at all times miserable, future Judgment might have appeared unnecessary, as justice had already taken place. On the other hand, had no distinction whatever taken place in the present system between the

righteous and the wicked as to happiness and misery, there might have been ground to suspect that, since universal disorder at present prevailed, disorder would ever continue, and never be rectified by any future Judgment. But neither of these suppositions is founded in fact. The present state of the moral world is neither a state of complete justice and order, nor of absolute disorder, but a state of order and justice begun and carried to a certain length, though left as yet imperfect.—— Observe, my brethren, that, in the whole structure and constitution of things, God hath shown himself to be favourable to virtue, and inimical to vice and guilt. He hath made a fixed provision for happiness to virtue by the powerful recommendation which it carries to universal esteem and love; by the manifold benefits which it procures to society; by the health, peace, and comfort of mind which it brings to the virtuous man. At the same time from the crimes of the wicked, a multitude of miseries is made infallibly to spring; loss of character and esteem, and of confidence and regard in society; health always impaired by vice; and all comfortable enjoyment of life disturbed by an uneasy companion, which the sinner carries about with him in his own conscience, upbraiding him for his crimes, and threatening him with the displeasure of the Almighty.

These are not things of casual or accidental occurrence, but of universal experience, taking their rise from the constitution of our nature, and from the fixed laws which regulate human events. They show us what the direct tendency of virtue and vice is appointed by Providence to be; and if this tendency be not, in every instance, carried into effect, owing

to circumstances which belong to our present state of probation and discipline, yet such an established natural tendency carries a sufficient intimation of the will and pleasure of our Creator.

We see his *throne already set for Judgment.* By his beginning in this world both to reward and to punish, we clearly behold him acting as a governor and a judge, and are led to prognosticate what course he will hereafter hold. By the constitution of things which he has fixed here, he has as plainly signified that he favours the virtuous, and is displeased with the wicked, as if he had declared it to us by a voice from the clouds. — Although the present state of mankind requires that the just should sometimes suffer, and the sinner be allowed to prosper, the strongest presumption still remains that there is a period to come, when God will complete his righteous government, by making the one fully blest, and rendering the other as miserable as they deserve to be; especially as we can observe,

In the fourth place, that a satisfactory account may be given why judgment is at present postponed, and complete retribution not made, either to the good or bad. We are to take notice, that even among men, the wisdom and justice of government do not consist in immediately rewarding and punishing on every occasion, but in exercising those acts of government publicly, at such times, and with such circumstances as may have the most powerful effect for the benefit of society. A similar consideration perfectly accounts for the full execution of justice being delayed by God in this world; for rewards and punishments being only begun here, but left

unfinished. Were they completed in this world to their full extent, all the purposes of a state of trial and discipline would be defeated. No room would be left for exercise and improvement to the good in many virtues, if they never were to undergo any trials; if they felt full reward immediately conferred on every righteous action they performed, and saw the wicked instantly cut off, as soon as a crime was committed. For salutary discipline, therefore, to the good, in order to improve their virtues; and from patience to the bad, in order to give them room for repentance; it was fit and wise that final judgment should at present be postponed. Divine justice stands for a while, as behind the veil, and leaves men at full scope to act according to their different dispositions, that their real characters may be fully displayed; the fidelity of the upright be tried and proved, and the obstinately wicked left without excuse. —— The delay of judgment therefore, and the seeming inequality that now takes place in the ways of Providence, is so far from forming any ground of suspicion that judgment will never come, that on the contrary, it is an argument of the wisdom of the Divine government, and necessarily enters into the plans it is now carrying forward.

Such are the presumptions which reason furnishes for rendering it more than probable that, at the conclusion of human things, God will *render to every one according to his works.* They may serve to strengthen our faith; but on mere reasonings our faith rests not. God in his mercy has given us surer light in an article of so great importance. To the consideration, therefore, of the discoveries which

the gospel of Christ hath made to us, we now proceed.

II. You all know how often we are assured in the New Testament, that God hath *appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness*; a day and an hour which no man knoweth, but which is fixed in the counsels of Heaven. In the Sacred Writings a very particular account is given us of the whole procedure of that solemn day, accompanied with an assemblage of circumstances of the most awful and terrific nature. The scene is such as forbids all attempts to heighten, or even to do it justice by human description. Beneath such a subject all imagination sinks. The efforts of the declaimer or the poet are here alike in vain. —— We are informed that the Last Day shall be ushered in by *signs in the sun, and signs in the moon and stars; upon the earth, distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after the things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of Heaven shall be shaken. The sound of a trumpet shall be heard, at which the dead shall rise out of their graves. The sign of the Son of man shall appear. He shall come in a cloud with power and great glory, and all the holy Angels with him. A great white throne shall be set, and he shall sit thereon in his glory. Before Him shall be gathered all nations. Books shall be opened, and the dead shall be judged out of the things which are found written in the books. He shall separate the righteous from the wicked as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the righteous on his right hand, and the*

wicked on his left! Then shall he say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. To them on his left hand he shall say, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels; and these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. * —— Whether every one of the circumstances here set forth, is to be understood in a strictly literal sense, or with some measure of mystical and allegorical interpretation, it is not easy to determine, nor is it essential for us to know. Regard must be had to the figurative style frequently employed by the sacred writers, of which we find so many examples in the prophetical writings and the Book of Revelation, wherein those spiritual divine things which are above our conception, are set forth under such representations of sensible objects and appearances as are most calculated to strike and impress our minds. The circumstance, for instance, of books being opened before the Judge, as containing a register of every man's actions, and of the dead being judged from what had been written in those books, is plainly a metaphorical allusion to what is practised among men; designed merely to convey the strongest impression of God's strict and accurate observation of the minutest particulars of men's behaviour on earth. It is sufficient for us to be satisfied, that whatever tremendous grandeur may attend the judgment of the Last Day, it will be conducted in such a manner as shall be perfectly suitable to the perfections of the Almighty. —— Resting on such facts as are plainly

* Luke, xxi. 25. Daniel, vii. 9. Matth. xxv. 31.

and explicitly revealed on this subject, let us consider,

In the first place, the Person who is to act as a judge, even the eternal Son of God. We must all, says the text, appear *before the judgment seat of Christ.* This is repeated in many passages of the New Testament. The day of judgment is termed *the day of the Son of Man. The Father*, we are told, *judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son.* * — This constitution of Providence is, in many respects, wise, fit, and gracious. It was highly proper that He who once, in the cause of God and mankind, stood as a criminal before impious judges on earth, should be thus signally vindicated and honoured, by appearing in the illustrious character of the Judge of all the earth. It was fit that the character of Judge and Sovereign should be made known, as added to the other characters he bore, of Priest and Prophet, in order to give weight and authority to all his precepts, from the awful consideration that on our obedience to him depends our everlasting fate. — But the most striking and important circumstance in this appointment of Providence is the assurance which it affords us of the perfect equity of this final judgment. For here we behold a Judge who is taken, as we may say, from among ourselves. He dwelt among us on earth, and did not disdain to call us brethren. He knows experimentally what human passions and human frailties are; and what the Apostle to the Hebrews says of him as a Priest, may be as fully applied to him as a Judge. *We have not*

* John, v. 22.

a Judge who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but One who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. The infinite majesty of the Supreme Being is an object at all times overwhelming to the mind. In the situation of a Judge particularly, it might fill us with dismay. But in the Person of our blessed Redeemer, that majesty is placed in a milder light. The attribute of mercy comes forward in so conspicuous a manner as to allay the dread we would otherwise entertain. To the obstinate and hardened sinner, the judgment of our Saviour may indeed justly occasion terror. Well may they be afraid of appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ, who have scorned and despised him and his religion. But to the pious and the humble, no consideration can carry more comfort than that they are to appear in judgment before him who so loved the human race as to die for them; and from whom, therefore, may be expected every favourable allowance which their case will admit. — From the contemplation of the Judge, let us,

In the second place, turn our thoughts towards the persons who are to be judged. These, we are again and again informed, shall be all mankind; both the quick and the dead; those who shall then be found upon the earth; and all the past generations who have finished their course, and been long ago gathered unto their fathers. *We must all,* says the text, *appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.* — No privilege shall exempt the great, no obscurity shelter the low from the judgment of God. All the frivolous distinctions which fashion and vanity had introduced among men, shall at that day be annihi-

lated. No longer shall we then appear under the personated characters of high and low, of rich and poor. — Under the simple characters of men and subjects of God, we shall be brought forth to be judged according to our works. In the one great distinction of good and bad, of righteous or wicked, all other distinctions shall then be eternally lost. — Let the foresight of this humble the pride of the ostentatious and the great. Thou who now carriest thy head so high, shalt, upon the same footing with thy lowest dependent, stand before the tribunal of the Almighty. Thou who now oppressest thy weak brother with impunity, shalt then tremble for thine own safety as much, perhaps more, than he, for *there is no respect of persons with God.* —— The Last Day is justly styled the *day of the revelation of the secrets of all hearts.* Stripped of all disguise, the character of every man shall be unveiled to public view. Then shall the false friend be detected, the concealed slanderer be exposed, the secret adulterer, the treacherous enemy, the hypocritical pretender, be all brought to light. — What a check should the thought of this discovery give to the arts of dissimulation and falsehood? What avails it thee, O wise man of the world! to pass for a short time with fair colours before the eye of men, if by the eye of God thou art already discovered, and shalt, at last, be discovered to the view of all mankind? If now thou art so solicitous to conceal thy real character from the world, and canst not bear that the designs and intrigues which have passed through thy mind in the course of but one day should be all made known, dost thou not tremble at the thought of the whole machinations of thy life being brought forth and proclaimed before

assembled men and angels? —— At this great day, too, when secret vice is made known in order to be punished, secret virtue shall be disclosed and rewarded. The humble good man, who passed unnoticed through the obscurity of private life; whose days, if not marked by any splendid deeds, were ennobled by virtuous actions, shall then be singled out from the crowd, and brought forward as the friend of God and Heaven. — The anguish of the wicked, upon the dicovery and comparison of the life of such a person with their own, is thus beautifully described by one of the Apocryphal writers; *This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. Now he is numbered among the Children of God, and his lot is among the saints. But we wearied ourselves in the way of destruction. What hath pride profited us? Or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasted by. But the righteous live for evermore. Their reward also is with the Lord; and the care of them with the Most High.* * —— From this view of the persons who are to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, let us,

In the third place, go on to the consideration of the things for which they are to be judged. These, we are told in the text, are all *the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad.* This is the constant tenour of Scripture, that men are to be judged *according to their actions.* It is not said that men

* Wisdom of Solomon, v. 3—15.

are to be finally judged according to their principles or belief, but *according to their works.* This does not lead to any conclusion that principles or belief are not essential in forming a character. Without good principles it cannot be expected there can be any regular tenour of good actions. But actions are the test of principles. Whatever we may pretend as to our belief, it is the strain of our actions that must show whether our principles have been good or bad; and supposing them ever so good, whether we have allowed them to exert a proper influence on our conduct. The constant doctrine of the Gospel is, *by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of my Father shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.** —— Of all the actions we have done, it is represented that, in the day of judgment, strict examination shall be taken. Not our public conduct only, and what we reckon the momentous parts of our life, but the indulgence of our private pleasures, the amusements of our secret thoughts and idle hours, shall be brought into account. According to that emblematical representation given in the Gospel, which I before mentioned as an expressive figure, there is an invisible pen always writing over our heads, and making an exact register of all the transactions of our life. — How careful and circumspect ought this to render us over every part of our behaviour? If any of our actions were of a transient and fugitive nature; if they were to die with us, and to be forgotten as soon as they are gone, there might be some excuse for a

* Matthew, vii. 21.

loose and inconsiderate conduct. But we know the case to be widely different; and that what we are doing now, we do for eternity. None of our actions perish and are forgotten. They will all accompany us to the tribunal of God. They will there testify, either for or against us; and, however much we might wish to disclaim some of them, they may be considered as lifting up their voices and saying, "We "are thine, for thou hast done us; we are thy works, "and we will follow the!"

It will now be said, if so severe a scrutiny must be undergone for all we have done and thought, who shall be able to stand before God in Judgment?—How far from innocence shall the best of us be found at that day?—The thought is undoubtedly alarming. But let us not despond; we are assured, *there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared. He is not extreme to mark iniquity; for he knows our frame, and remembers we are dust.* Powerful is the atonement of our blessed Redeemer to procure pardon for the greatest sinner who has been penitent. We have all reason to believe, that, amidst numberless infirmities which attend humanity, what the great Judge will chiefly regard, is the habitual prevailing turn of our heart and life; how far we have been actuated by a sincere desire to do our duty. This we know for certain, that all the measures of this judgment shall be conducted with the most perfect equity. God will not exact from any man what he had never given him. He will judge him according to the degree of light that was afforded him, according to the means of knowledge and improvement that were put into his hands. Hence many a virtuous heathen shall be preferred before many mere

professors of Christian faith. *They shall come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God; when the children of the kingdom are cast out.** For as the Apostle to the Romans hath taught us, *they who sinned without the law*, that is, without the knowledge of the written law, *shall perish*, shall be judged, *without the law, for when the Gentiles which have not the law, do, by nature, the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves.*† — In the account given by our Lord of the procedure of the last judgment, in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, particular stress is laid upon works of beneficence and mercy; on the hungry being fed, the naked being clothed, and the sick being visited by the righteous. But though in that parable, no virtues of any other kind are particularized, we are certainly not to infer any exclusion of other parts of duty: of piety, justice, temperance, and purity; as requisite to the character of the man, who at the Last Day, will be accepted by God. The scope of the parable was to impress that covetous and selfish nation of the Jews, to whom the parable was addressed, with a deep sense of the importance of those virtues in which they were remarkably deficient, and which are in themselves so essential, compassion and humanity to their brethren. — It now only remains,

In the last place, to fix our attention on that final definitive sentence, which is to close the whole procedure of the Last Day, and to terminate for ever

* Luke, xii. 29. Matthew, viii. 11.
† Romans, ii. 12. 14.

the hopes and fears of the human race. The righteous are by the great Judge called to eternal life and happiness, and the wicked appointed to go into everlasting punishment. — Into those future habitations of the good and the bad, it is not ours to penetrate. All that we know is, that after the Judge hath pronounced the righteous to be the *blessed of his Father*, they shall be *caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so they shall be ever with the Lord* *; received into mansions where all the inhabitants shall be blest; but where we are taught there shall be different degrees of exaltation and felicity, according to the advancement which men had made in holiness and virtue; *one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, and one star differing from another in glory.*† On the misery prepared for the reprobate, it would be shocking to dwell, and in a high degree improper and presumptuous in us to descant on the degree and duration of those punishments which infinite justice and wisdom may see cause to inflict on the incurably wicked. — The whole great scheme of Providence being now completed, and its ways fully justified to all rational beings, well may universal acclamations of praise arise from all the heavenly hosts; *Hallelujah to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb of God for ever and ever! Great and marvellous are all thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are all thy ways, thou King of Saints!* — This earth, which had been so long the theatre of human actions and human glory, having now accomplished the purpose for

* 1 Thes. iv. 17. † 1 Corinth. xv. 41.

which, as a temporary structure, it was erected, shall at this consummation of things, finally disappear from the universe. *The heavens shall pass away with a great noise: the elemests shall melt with fervent heat; the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up**; *and its place shall know it no more!*

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole of man; the whole of his duty, his interest, and his happiness. It is the road to a comfortable life, to a peaceful death, to a happy eternity. *For God,* addeth the wise man, *shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*—Let the prospect of this judgment so dwell on our minds as to produce that degree of seriousness, which in this vain and changing world, becomes us as Christians, becomes us as men. If it be our care to preserve a good conscience, and to do the things that are right, that judgment will not be to us an object of dismay. On the contrary, amidst the many discouragements which our virtuous endeavours meet with at present, it will be a comfort to think that *verily there is a just God to judge the earth,* who shall in the end *make all crooked things straight,* and fully recompence his servants for the hardships they may now suffer by persevering in the path of integrity.—This is the season, not of reaping, but of sowing; not of rest and enjoyment, but of labour and combat. You are now running the race; hereafter you shall receive the prize. You are now approving

* 2 Pet. iii. 10.

your fidelity, in the midst of trials; at the Last Day you shall receive the crown of the faithful. *Be patient, therefore, establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. The Judge is at hand; and his reward is with him.*

THE END.

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